

**AFGHANISTAN: U.S. POLICY  
AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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SEPTEMBER 15, 2016  
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## **AFGHANISTAN: U.S. POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2016**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:54 a.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Corker [presiding], Flake, Gardner, Isakson, Barrasso, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Udall, and Murphy.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CORKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

The CHAIRMAN. I want to thank you gentlemen for being here and for your service to our country. The meeting is called to order.

I apologize for being a few minutes late. I forgot we changed the time to 9:45 from 10 so Ben could go to a meeting that I think is occurring at 10:30. So thank you for accommodating both meetings.

Obviously, Afghanistan continues to be something that is important to our U.S. national interests. We brokered a government, if you will, the United States did in 2014, that created both a President and CEO office that has not been confirmed, if you will, through the *loya jirga* and continued on.

I think we had concerns about that process taking place. And you wonder about the support that that government has relative to not being confirmed in the way that it normally would.

I have tremendous respect for President Ghani and a warm relationship with CEO Abdullah. Obviously, their roles together have been interesting. They have sort of muddled through it together, as one might expect with the type of arrangements that have been “created from the outside.”

I was really glad to see President Obama commit to 8,400 troops going forward. I think the security situation there does not warrant changing that at this time. I would have liked for it to have occurred earlier, but it seems like we have been able to continue to have the support of our allies in the region.

I appreciate, certainly, the additional authorities that have been given to our military there to counter Al Qaeda and to work more closely with the Afghan troops themselves.

I think we know that the close air support has been very, very important to them in saving their lives and pushing back what is happening with insurgencies there.

We have a complicated future there, and I do want to hear from both of our outstanding witnesses today.

On one hand, we have the Taliban there that we are continuing to counter, appropriately so. And on the other hand, we have expressed, in the past, our desire to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban, the very people we went to Afghanistan in the first place in 2001 to take out.

It is very complicated, complicated further by the fact that Pakistan continues to be a tremendously duplicitous partner in this.

Mr. Olson and I have talked about this on several occasions, but certainly, they are working against our interests there through helping support, in the ways that they do, the Haqqani network. They are the greatest threat to American soldiers there, certainly the greatest threat to the Afghan military and civilians.

So I look forward to your testimony. I do wish it was enhanced with someone from the military. I had a good meeting yesterday with one of the generals involved in the transition issues.

I do not understand why the civilian side of the military continues to be in over their head, it seems, in their ability to cooperate in hearings that would be very beneficial to our witnesses. But they seem to be in over their heads.

So with that, I will turn to Senator Cardin.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN. Well, Mr. Chairman, first, thanks for convening this hearing on the 15th anniversary of the international engagement in Afghanistan. I think it is appropriate that we take a look at where we are and where we are heading, and evaluate how we can achieve our objectives.

This hearing, of course, is in the aftermath of the NATO Warsaw Summit, so we will be able to at least get an update as to the commitments made there, and the upcoming Brussels conference, which will take place in October.

Ambassador Olson, I want to share Chairman Corker's comments.

The first issue of concern is security, and I take it the Department of Defense felt that you were fully capable of responding to all of our questions on the security issues, because they declined to have you have help at this hearing, which I join Senator Corker in expressing my regret.

The CHAIRMAN. And that was the civilian side, we might add, the civilian leadership, not the military leadership.

Senator CARDIN. Absolutely.

So anyway, we will want to get an update on the security. It is critically important.

We know the Afghan Special Forces have been particularly effective, but it looks like they are stretched rather thin throughout the country in dealing with the security needs. So we would be interested as to how the conventional forces are capable of maintaining the security in the different regions of Afghanistan. That is critically important.

Obviously, the peace process, what is happening? Is there a possibility we can move forward? Pakistan's role, is it constructive in assisting us in the peace process in Afghanistan?

I look forward to your update on the governance structures within Afghanistan, the status of the emerging democratic institutions.

Senator Corker already mentioned that President Ghani and CEO Abdullah, the national unity government agreement of 2014. We have seen signs, at least recently, that there has been some division here. Is the unity still there? Is it still effectively operating as a unity government in Afghanistan?

I am extremely interested in the protection of human rights. Recent reports of child abuse by some of the Afghan National Security Forces, that is absolutely unacceptable. And I want to make sure that, in our participation in Afghanistan, we have zero tolerance for that type of activity and that is made clear through all of our participating arms.

Which brings me to Mr. Sampler and the work that USAID is doing in Afghanistan, our largest efforts in the world, at great personal sacrifice to the men and women who are carrying out that aid, some who have given their lives.

So I really first express my deep appreciation to the workforce at USAID and the leaders there.

Mr. Sampler, I understand that this may be one of your last days at USAID, that you are moving on. And I just really want to thank both of you for your service to our country.

Lastly, we need to take a look at the aid program, as to how it is being administered. Considering the size of the Afghan economy, is it being right-sized? Do we need to make sure that it is working effectively in carrying out lasting reform? It is time for us to evaluate that aid package as well.

So, Mr. Chairman, this is a very important hearing. As you pointed out, I regret that I will be leaving for part of the hearing. We have the Counselor of Burma that is in town.

You had a chance, Mr. Chairman, to meet with her yesterday at breakfast. I have an opportunity to meet with her in a few moments, and I am going to take advantage of that.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, very good. We appreciate those comments, and, obviously, you will be the first questioner so you make sure that you have time to do what you need to do.

Our first witness is Ambassador Richard Olson, the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I think you may be leaving soon, too. Is that correct?

Ambassador OLSON. I will be departing before the end of the year, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. We thank you also. Both of you are leaving very soon for distinguished careers in helping ensure that our national interests are pursued, and we thank you for being here today.

Our second witness is Mr. Donald L. Sampler, Jr., the Assistant to the Administrator for Pakistan and Afghanistan at USAID.

We appreciate you both being here. I think you know you can summarize your comments, if you will, in about 5 minutes.

Without objection, your written testimony will be made part of the record.

And, again, we thank you both for being here. And if you would just speak in the order introduced, that would be great. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. RICHARD OLSON, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Ambassador OLSON. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to update you on U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and the region.

In light of many years working together, I wanted to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the members and staff of the committee for your continued support of one of our highest priority foreign policy agendas.

2016 has been a significant year for Afghanistan and progress has been made, but important work lays ahead, as we will discuss today. My written testimony, which has been submitted for the record, touches on many topics that I expect we will discuss, including prospects for peace and reconciliation, and regional dynamics.

Our partnership with Afghanistan remains strong. The Government of Afghanistan continues to be an important ally in the fight against terrorism, and Kabul works with us to eliminate the remnants of Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and disrupt and degrade the rise of Islamic State.

To strengthen Afghanistan's capabilities as a partner, and to improve the lives of the Afghan people, we continue to invest U.S. resources to strengthen Afghanistan security forces, to improve governance, build institutions, and strengthen the economy.

The Afghan Government has made headway on launching and implementing reforms using these instruments.

We are nearing the 2-year mark of the political partnership between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah brokered in 2014. Despite the challenges inherent to coalition government, we believe the unity government provides the most viable path towards stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah remain resolutely focused on achieving a more stable, secure, and prosperous Afghanistan.

Political stability is directly linked to a positive security environment. Afghan Security Forces have incorporated lessons learned from previous fighting seasons into their current operations with improving results. The Afghan Security Forces are performing better this year.

The fighting has not been easy, and there has been an increase in casualties, but the Taliban have not been able to capture or hold strategically significant locations for any extended periods of time.

Afghanistan continues to engender strong international support. We cannot overemphasize how critical this support is for Afghan security and development. Afghanistan will continue to need international support to consolidate the gains of the past 15 years.

President Obama's July troop extension announcement was welcomed by our allies and partners. At the Warsaw NATO summit in July, allies and partners agreed to extend the Resolute Support Mission and pledged support to the Afghan Security Forces for another 3 years, totaling approximately \$1 billion per year until 2020.

The October 4th and 5th Brussels conference on Afghanistan, co-hosted by the European Union and Afghanistan, will solidify international support for Afghanistan's development and government reform plans for the years ahead. Ahead of Brussels, Afghanistan is showing tangible reform progress that remains critical for donor confidence.

While international support for Afghanistan remains strong, the regional picture remains complex. A constructive relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan remains essential to bringing peace and stability to the region. Following significant improvement after the election of President Ghani, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have peaked and troughed, tested by terrorism, refugees, and border management.

On counterterrorism, Pakistan has made progress in shutting down terrorist safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and worked with us to decimate core Al Qaeda. Pakistan faces a serious threat from terrorists who continue to target its schools, hospitals, and places of worship.

While Pakistan's progress is laudable, its struggle with terrorism will not come to an end until it decisively shifts away from tolerating externally focused groups. U.S. officials have been very clear that Pakistan must target all militant groups without discrimination, including those that target Pakistan's neighbors, and shut down all safe havens in its territory.

In this regard, we welcome General Raheel Sharif's statement on July 6th, in which he directed Pakistani military commanders, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement officials to take concrete measures to deny any militant safe haven group safe haven or use of Pakistani soil to launch terrorist attacks in Afghanistan.

While significant obstacles lay ahead, from corruption to ministerial administration, and the need for further economic and political stability, Afghanistan continues to be an invaluable partner for the United States in the heart of Asia.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today, and I look forward to our discussion and your questions. Thank you, sir.

[Ambassador Olson's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD OLSON

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the committee—thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to update you on Afghanistan: U.S. Policy and International Commitments.

OVERVIEW

2016 has been a significant year for Afghanistan. In their second year bearing full security responsibility, and despite facing a formidable foe on the battlefield, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) demonstrated greater discipline, capacity and esprit de corps than we have seen thus far. We have an engaged and constructive partner in the Afghan government, which has continued to demonstrate real progress towards major reform and development milestones. This includes accession to the World Trade Organization in July, increased revenue collection, establishment of a new Anti-Corruption Justice Center, implementation of anti-money laundering regulations, and substantial upgrades to critical infrastructure projects. Importantly, at the Warsaw Summit in July, our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies and coalition partners successfully extended international support for Afghan security forces beyond 2016.

Our work is far from over. Next month, Afghanistan will seek additional support for its development imperatives at the European Union's Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. Critical to the success of the conference will be the unity government's message. President Ghani and Chief Executive (CEO) Abdullah continue to work through challenges associated with their political partnership, as they remain resolutely focused on achieving a more stable, secure, and prosperous Afghanistan. President Ghani and CEO Abdullah are both committed to moving the country forward, strengthening its democracy, and deepening its institutional roots.

#### UNITY GOVERNMENT

The strong bilateral relationship between the United States and Afghanistan undergirds Afghanistan's continued progress. Afghanistan remains an important partner of the United States in the fight against terrorism, working with us to eliminate the remnants of al-Qaeda and its affiliates. In order to strengthen Afghanistan's capabilities as a partner, and to improve the lives of the Afghan people, we continue to invest U.S. resources to help Afghanistan improve its governance, institutions and economy.

Our partnership is built on the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2012, which lays out respective economic and political commitments, as well as the Bilateral Security Agreement, which lays out mutual security understandings. President Ghani signed the Bilateral Security Agreement as one of his first acts as President. Both agreements extend through 2024, making clear that the United States and Afghanistan see this as an enduring relationship with mutual political and security benefits.

The United States remains firmly committed to the unity government established through the 2014 political agreement brokered by Secretary Kerry. The unity government provides the most viable path towards stability and prosperity in Afghanistan, despite the challenges inherent to coalition governments. As we near the two-year mark of the political partnership between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah, there has been predictable jockeying among political actors in Kabul. It is difficult to predict how this will evolve over coming weeks, but our position has been clear.

As Secretary Kerry said during his visit in April, the government has a five-year mandate under the Afghan constitution. We continue to urge all parties to resolve their political differences peacefully and in accordance with the country's Constitution and laws. Afghanistan is a diverse country, and its citizens need and deserve a government that is effective, inclusive and able to represent all segments of society. President Ghani and CEO Abdullah remain committed to holding the parliamentary elections and Constitutional Loya Jirga called for in their political agreement, and are working to implement the electoral reforms needed to address the shortcomings that have undermined previous elections. U.S. officials at all levels continue to emphasize the importance of tangible progress on electoral reforms, a credible election timeline, and a reasonable plan to prepare for the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

#### PROGRESS ON SECURITY

Political stability and unity are also necessary to create the right conditions for continued progress by the ANDSF on the battlefield. Afghan security forces have incorporated lessons learned from the previous fighting season into their current operations, with improving results.

This year, the ANDSF developed a campaign strategy of "fight, hold, disrupt" which involved defending key population centers and infrastructure, holding onto other critical areas through enhanced coordination between the army and police, and, finally, disrupting insurgent activities where a persistent ANDSF presence is not required. The fight has not been easy. The ANDSF casualty levels are higher this year than last, but the ANDSF continue to execute their campaign strategy and have demonstrated their resilience in security operations around the country. The Taliban have also suffered significant casualties and have been unable to capture or hold strategically significant locations for extended periods. They have failed to achieve their strategic goal of overthrowing the government by force.

U.S. forces are also continuing to disrupt and degrade Islamic State activities in Afghanistan, through partnered operations with Afghan forces, as well as unilateral operations. Combatting the Islamic State and the remnants of al-Qaeda will continue to be a priority for the United States, as we work to ensure that Afghanistan is never again a safe haven for terrorism. And we are not alone in our support for this imperative.

## COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Afghanistan continues to engender strong international support. The long duration, broad participation and extensive level of this support is a testament to the international community's enduring commitment to Afghanistan as it labors to become a secure, stable and economically viable regional actor. We cannot overemphasize how critical this support continues to be.

Through NATO, thirty-nine allied and partner countries, including the United States, are working together to provide training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces via the non-combat Resolute Support Mission. President Obama's announcement in July that the United States will retain some 8,400 U.S. forces in Afghanistan into 2017, roughly 6,300 of them for the NATO mission, was welcomed by allies; similar commitments of support were made by other Resolute Support partners at the NATO Warsaw Summit. At Warsaw, allies and partners agreed to extend the Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016, and to do so in several geographic areas. This is critical, as it will allow us to continue to provide training, advice, and assistance to the ANDSF in the provinces at the corps level. Allies and partners are expected to provide roughly 6,000 troops to Resolute Support in 2017, in addition to pledged U.S. forces. As demonstrated by the ANDSF's improved operations, the coalition's train, advise and assist mission is working; investments are paying off at the tactical and institutional levels.

In addition to the Resolute Support Mission, the international community continues to provide not only political and diplomatic support, but also significant financial assistance. This has been borne out in unprecedented levels of development and security assistance.

## WARSAW SUMMIT PLEDGES

At the Warsaw Summit, nearly thirty donor nations pledged to extend current financial assistance for the Afghan security forces for another three years—totaling approximately one billion dollars per year for the 2018–2020 period. Despite shrinking aid budgets and competing priorities, these pledges come close to those made at the NATO Summit in Chicago in 2012 for the 2015–2017 period, for a combined total of six years of funding support. To ensure Afghan security forces are fully capable, it is essential that the United States also continue to provide robust financial support.

Together, continued international military and financial support for the ANDSF has bolstered morale and ensured the continued development of Afghan forces. Motivated and capable security forces underpin public confidence. Our support has also sent an important signal to regional actors that international backing for Afghanistan is not waning. This message needs to be further underscored at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October.

## BRUSSELS CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

On October 4–5, Afghanistan and the European Union will co-host the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. As was the case for the Tokyo Conference of 2012 and the London Conference of 2014, the Brussels Conference will serve as a focal point for encouraging the Afghan government to make further reforms to strengthen governance, the rule of law, human rights, and the economy. Afghanistan recognizes that aid levels will gradually decrease as Afghan self-reliance increases. Additional reforms are slated ahead of the Brussels Conference that will bring Afghanistan further toward self-reliance.

Ahead of Brussels, Afghanistan is preparing to show tangible reform progress on two fronts. First, Afghanistan has undertaken to achieve 30 governance, social and economic reform goals and anti-corruption measures laid out in the September 2015 "Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework." Thus far, over 90 percent of these steps have either been completed or are on track to be completed. Second, the Afghan government is working with donors to develop a set of benchmarks for the coming two years, to serve as the next phase of the donor-Afghan partnership. These steps will reinforce the principle of mutual accountability that underpins the extraordinary support by the international community to Afghanistan, making clear that continued support at current levels is justified by measureable progress on vital, mutually identified reforms.

Although development achievements over the past decade and a half in Afghanistan are remarkable, Afghanistan will continue to need international support and engagement in order to consolidate and expand hard-won progress to date. At Brussels, the European Union and Afghanistan are asking international donors to extend aid commitments to Afghanistan through 2020. We have supported EU and Afghan

efforts to secure total pledges of approximately \$2 billion per year in development assistance for 2017–2020 from other donors. We intend to work closely with Congress to finalize a U.S. pledge at Brussels that maintains our leadership role in Afghanistan and among the international community.

#### REGIONAL DYNAMICS

While international support for Afghanistan remains strong, regional support continues to be filtered through complex national priorities. Despite greater regional cooperation overall, regional players continue to hedge so long as they have doubts about the viability of the Afghan state. We continue to support Afghanistan as it works to improve relations with its neighbors and near-neighbors, promoting broader regional stability.

A constructive relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan remains essential to bringing peace and stability to the region. Following significant improvement after the election of President Ghani, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have peaked and troughed over the past year in part due to critical issues, including refugees, border management, and counterterrorism. However, there have been some encouraging signs of progress in recent months. After a meeting in June between Afghan Foreign Minister Rabbani and Pakistani Advisor on Foreign Affairs Aziz, both sides agreed to coordinate at senior and tactical levels on border management issues; the first tactical-level meeting happened in late July and both sides agreed to meet again. We support this mechanism and believe that more bilateral dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan will increase prospects for mutual understanding, regional peace and stability.

In the wake of the deadly August 24 attack on the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul, Afghanistan provided Pakistan with evidence that prompted the Pakistan military to conduct combing operations in a few key areas along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Pakistan is sharing the results of those operations with Afghanistan. Efforts to bring those behind the attack to justice are critical.

Pakistan's military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas remain important. The Pakistani military has made progress in shutting down terrorist safe havens through Operation Zarb-e-Azb and most recently in Operation Khyber III in the Rajgal Valley of Khyber Agency, with the aim to restore security to parts of Pakistan that have been used as terrorist safe havens for years. Pakistan has worked with us to decimate core al-Qaeda.

While the progress Pakistan has made through its recent operations is laudable, its struggle with terrorism will not come to an end until it makes a decisive shift in its policy of tolerance towards externally-focused groups. U.S. officials have been very clear with the most senior Pakistani leadership that Pakistan must target all militant groups without discrimination—including those that target Pakistan's neighbors—and close all safe havens.

Pakistan's leaders have assured of us of their intention to do so. In this regard, we welcomed Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif's statement on July 6, in which he directed Pakistani military commanders, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement agencies to take concrete measures to deny any militant group safe haven or the use of Pakistani soil to launch terrorist attacks in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has also played a critical role in generously hosting 1.5 million Afghan refugees for nearly 40 years. Pakistan's contributions in this regard have been essential to providing asylum space for Afghans displaced by conflict and in furthering our goal of long-term peace and stability in the region. Pakistan should continue to uphold humanitarian principles and respect the principle of voluntary return, as outlined in the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees.

Other regional actors also have a role to play. We continue to support the India-Afghanistan relationship, including through the revival of a U.S.-India-Afghanistan trilateral, which will take place next week on the margins of the UN General Assembly. We welcomed India's provision of training and non-lethal security assistance to Afghanistan and its significant development contributions over the past decade-plus. China's role in the region continues to evolve, and includes its participation in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group. We have also welcomed China's bilateral development aid and look forward to seeing China at the Brussels conference.

Russia and Iran can play positive roles in Afghanistan, but will require intensive U.S. engagement to reassure them that they can place their faith in the Afghan government. Both have the potential to act as spoilers, and we are monitoring reports about potential collaboration with the Taliban against the Islamic State, which the Afghan government is working actively to discourage.

## MOVING FORWARD

The next administration should continue to engage with Afghanistan and the region. It should continue to work with our international partners to advance the goal of a stable, secure and economically viable Afghanistan. Our focus this year, together with Afghan partners, has been to secure critical milestones toward this effort.

The United States clarified its presence beyond 2016 and Afghanistan is working to navigate the challenges of coalition governance. NATO Allies and partners agreed to ensure that the Resolute Support Mission will continue to provide the training, advice and assistance the ANDSF need in 2017. In Warsaw, we worked with international partners to gain requisite ANDSF funding commitments for 2018–2020. We expect to meet our financial targets for development funding at Brussels.

Of course, challenges remain. Evidence of corruption and nepotism remain, despite positive actions and decisions in the Afghan ministries. Sustained leadership and action is required to prevent gross violations of human rights and the use of child soldiers. Ministerial leadership communication has improved, but operationally, the Afghan Army and Police still struggle to coordinate their efforts and focus. Continued development assistance is needed to sustain the gains of the past fifteen years. The Afghan government will need to achieve sufficient stability and necessary reforms for future elections to be credible.

And, importantly, the United States will need to continue our persistent, patient diplomacy to achieve an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that leads to lasting peace in the region. We continue to welcome the support and cooperation of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China to advance prospects for direct dialogue—free of preconditions—between the Afghan government and the Taliban. We remain firm in our belief that only through a negotiated settlement—not a purely military campaign—will Afghanistan achieve lasting peace.

As the U.S.-Afghan partnership moves into a new phase with a new U.S. administration, the stakes remain high. The actions that the United States has taken this year in partnership with Afghanistan have ensured that the next administration can work together with Congress for continued progress.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I look forward to our discussion today, and welcome any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.  
Mr. Sampler?

**STATEMENT OF DONALD L. SAMPLER, JR., ASSISTANT TO THE  
ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN  
AFFAIRS, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOP-  
MENT, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. SAMPLER. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Senators, friends, and colleagues, it is an honor to be able to testify before you today about the work of USAID in Afghanistan.

Today is, in fact, my last full day as assistant administrator, so I will use my oral remarks at this, probably my last testimony, to reflect on my 14 years of almost continuous service in or on the reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Within weeks of the horrific attacks of September 11th in 2001, the U.S. and our allies had begun military action in Afghanistan. Supported by teams from my own former unit, the 5th Special Forces Group, forces loyal to the Northern Alliance quickly defeated the Taliban.

The Bonn Agreement established a path to governance for a new Afghanistan, and it established the international security force. And the U.S. Embassy was reopened with Ambassador Ryan Crocker as charge.

I first arrived in Afghanistan early in 2002 to assess the capacity of the nascent Afghan Government for conducting the emergency *loya jirga* that was required by the Bonn Agreement. My assessment was, as you might imagine, not particularly optimistic.

While Bonn had mandated that there be an interim government in Afghanistan, the capacity to build that government was basically nonexistent at the time.

That is an important first point I would like to share as I reminisce. What we call the reconstruction of Afghanistan is something of a misnomer. The Soviet occupation, followed by decades of brutal civil war and privation, had robbed Afghanistan of any sense of what governance was or could be.

The physical, emotional, intellectual, and human infrastructure of the country of Afghanistan was devastated over the course of 30 years, to the point that we were not reconstructing Afghanistan. We were helping the Afghans construct a new state from scratch.

So perhaps our initial estimates of the problems, the requisite solutions, and the prospects for rapid, meaningful social changes were too optimistic.

Yet, during the past 15 years, I have seen Afghanistan make remarkable gains, thanks to the efforts of the United States, our international partners, the Afghan Government, and the Afghan people.

The key elements of USAID's Afghanistan strategy remain to make durable the gains made in health, education, and opportunities for women; to maintain a focus on economic growth and fiscal sustainability; and to support a transparent, effective government in Afghanistan that is responsive to the needs of its citizens.

These efforts, in these regards, all contribute to our own national interests of combating terrorism and stabilizing the region.

Senators, when I first arrived in Kabul in 2002, I found a city with virtually no infrastructure, but with fantastic hopes and aspirations. I found a population with very little capacity, but with a great passion and an energy to learn. And I found a country with a very bleak, divisive, and painful past that was hoping for a brighter future and looking to the United States for support in that regard.

I am proud of what we have accomplished in Afghanistan over 14 years with the support of the United States Congress and the American people.

Today in Afghanistan, mothers and children are much less likely to die during or immediately after childbirth. More Afghans have access to health care, education, electricity, healthy food, clean water, cell phone service, and even the Internet in their rural local communities.

Afghan farmers today are being trained and equipped with modern farming techniques that increase both the quality and the yield of their farms to the point that the Afghan Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock hopes that Afghanistan can perhaps be food self-sufficient in 5 years.

And the Afghan education system, from primary school through university, is producing young Afghan women and men who are capable of contributing to their country, to their society, and to their economy in ways that were not imaginable in 2002.

We have accomplished much over 15 years of which we can collectively be proud, but we have much to learn from the experiences and failures along the way, and we must learn those lessons be-

cause we still have much more to accomplish with our Afghan colleagues in their decade of transformation.

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude my remarks by recognizing the people who have made our progress in Afghanistan possible, the men and women of our military; our allies in the Afghan National Security Forces; the thousands of civilians working with and for USAID, many of whom, I might add, had never experienced the kind of environments they would face in Afghanistan; the remarkable staff at USAID, and specifically the staff in the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs and at our mission in Kabul.

While I have the privilege of addressing you today, the accomplishments about which I will boast are the fruits of their labor, and of their Afghan colleagues.

And finally, I have to thank Ms. Barbara Smith, a dedicated and well-respected development professional who throughout my work in and on Afghanistan has been my counselor, confessor, intellectual sparring partner, and frequently my critic, but, most importantly, my wife. Her support has made my tenure in this position possible and her companionship has made it enjoyable.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, as I prepare to leave government, I am pleased to introduce Mr. Bill Hammink. He will be sworn in tomorrow as the new Assistant Administrator for Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs. He has served as a mission director in several countries around the world. He served for 3 years with me in Afghanistan as the mission director in that country. And he has served in senior positions here in Washington, so he knows the lay of the land here as well.

I am confident Bill is the right person for this job, and I am confident he will continue to lead USAID's efforts in Afghanistan in ways that make us and you proud.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Mr. Sampler's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DONALD L. SAMPLER, JR.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss U.S. policy and international commitments with regard to Afghanistan. It is an honor to appear before you with the U.S. Department of State's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Olson.

As today is my last full day serving as the Assistant to the Administrator for the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), I would like to begin by thanking those Americans who have served in Afghanistan, as well as their families. Whether serving as members of the armed forces, diplomats of the Department of State, aid workers from USAID, or the thousands of men and women who have worked shoulder to shoulder with us as contractors and partners, these brave Americans have helped the Afghan people make their country a better place. To that end, I would also like to recognize the Afghans who continue to work and sacrifice to make their country a place that is safe, secure, and a good neighbor in the region. The success of any strategy we discuss here today is predicated upon their continued dedication and our resolute support. These efforts are not without serious risk: since 2003, 454 people working for USAID and partner organizations in Afghanistan have been killed and 817 have been wounded.

Our work in Afghanistan embodies USAID's mission: We partner to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity. USAID's civilian assistance programs in Afghanistan are a critical component of our core U.S. national security objective in the region—a stable Afghanistan. We have seen the dire consequences of neglect and disengagement play out

in the region before, and that is why USAID's central goal in Afghanistan is to promote a stable, inclusive, and increasingly prosperous country.

I know that this goal is achievable because I have personally seen how Afghanistan has improved just over the past fifteen years. Remember what it was like in those early days. Within weeks of the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. and our allies had begun action in Afghanistan. Supported by Special Forces teams from my own former unit, 5th Special Forces Group, forces loyal to the Northern Alliance quickly defeated the Taliban. The Bonn Agreement established a path to governance for a new Afghanistan and established the International Security Assistance Force—initially a very small force confined in scope to the city and Province of Kabul. And the U.S. Embassy was re-opened, with Ambassador Ryan Crocker as Charge d'Affaires.

I first arrived in Afghanistan early in 2002 to assess the capacity of the truly nascent Afghan government for conducting the Emergency Loya Jirga that was required by the Bonn Agreement. My services were procured by USAID using a “purchase order,” meaning that I would not be an “official American direct hire employee” and would not be subject to the already fairly strict Chief of Mission security restrictions, but would have complete freedom of movement outside of the Embassy Compound. My assessment was, as you might imagine, not particularly optimistic. Bonn had mandated an “interim government of Afghanistan,” which was sworn-in on the 21st of December. But the capacity to actually create the government was nonexistent at the time.

That is a significant point I wish to share with you today: what we call the “reconstruction” of Afghanistan is something of a misnomer. The Soviet occupation, followed by decades of brutal civil war and privation, had robbed Afghanistan of any sense of what governance should be. Their social contracts were, of necessity, renegotiated—sometimes repeatedly—with local power-brokers, drug-traffickers, and warlords. The physical, emotional, intellectual and human infrastructure and capacity of the country were devastated over the course of 30 years, to the point that we were not “reconstructing” Afghanistan: we were helping them build a state from scratch. So our initial estimates of the problems and the requisite solutions may have been too optimistic.

Yet during the past fifteen years, Afghanistan has made remarkable development gains across multiple sectors, thanks to the whole-of-government efforts of the U.S., along with our international partners, the Afghan government, and the Afghan people. The key elements of USAID's Afghanistan strategy are to make durable the significant achievements in health, education, and opportunities for women; maintain focus on economic growth and fiscal sustainability through the government's increasing ability to collect revenue, attract investment and expand private sector growth; and support a transparent, effective government that is responsive to the development and democratic needs of its citizens. U.S. efforts to spur investment in Afghan enterprises and expand trade ties in the region all contribute to our efforts to combat terrorism and stabilize the region.

Afghanistan, and the region as a whole, present both enormous opportunities and serious challenges. The region, wracked with conflict for much of the last four decades, remains one of the least economically integrated in the world, with much of its real human potential untapped. Sustainable economic development will require the region's leaders to make fundamental changes. U.S. civilian assistance programs can be a catalyst and incentive for this change, and our efforts in Afghanistan today are delivering tangible, measurable results that contribute to this transformation.

I know from personal experience that the progress made in Afghanistan is remarkable. But it is still fragile. U.S. and international support is needed to shore up the significant investments that have brought the country this far. Now is not the time to walk away from either our partnership or our investment in the people and country of Afghanistan.

#### CONTINUED INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT

In just over two weeks, the United States and international donors will gather for the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan co-hosted by the European Union (EU) and the government of Afghanistan. The Brussels Conference will underscore the international community's steadfast support of Afghanistan's development, and will outline joint commitments to reform. Such international commitments and contributions over the past 14 years have enabled momentous achievements across security, education, health, the economy, infrastructure, women's rights and media in Afghanistan.

In a parallel effort, developed in partnership with the international community, the Afghan National Unity Government has committed to a renewed set of reform

benchmarks for the future. These steps acknowledge that continued international support is contingent on measurable progress being made by the Afghan government on these mutually-identified reforms. At Brussels, the Afghan Government will present their new Afghan National Peace and Development Framework, outlining priorities over the next five years, as well as five National Priority Programs and the next set of Self-Reliance for Mutual Accountability Framework deliverables. Challenges remain on the road to Afghanistan's progress and development, but the U.S. and the international community have a serious partner in the Unity Government, one that is engaged in reform, increasing transparency, and achieving progress.

#### RESULTS

Americans should be proud of the lasting impact and legacy of their assistance to Afghanistan. Afghanistan has changed dramatically, and for the better, from 2002 to 2016. USAID programs are implemented in Afghanistan in coordination with the Afghan government. The strong partnership between the two governments ensures development assistance matches Afghan national priorities for progress. The following are examples of successful investments by the U.S. and the international community in Afghanistan.

##### *Economic Growth*

Increased economic growth is crucial to Afghanistan's eventual self-reliance. In 2015, Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly \$20 billion is nearly two-and-a-half times greater than it was in 2002. In 2015, the nation's budgetary revenue increased by nearly 22 percent. This summer the Afghan Parliament ratified the country's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The policy and legislation required to accomplish WTO accession can significantly increase the ability of Afghan businesses to establish and benefit from regional trade initiatives. The moment marked the culmination of more than a half-decade of the country's intensive efforts to reform its trade environment and will open the doors to international markets, facilitate transit, resolve trade disputes, and pave the way for increased foreign investment. USAID worked closely with the Afghan Government in its journey to WTO membership.

In Afghanistan's dominant economic sector—agriculture—USAID programs are having an important impact. The sector accounts for up to 24 percent of Afghanistan's GDP and is critical to both the country's food security and as a driver of economic growth. Because of USAID programs, over 3.9 million Afghan households have benefitted from agriculture and alternative livelihood interventions and nearly 650,000 new farm or agribusinesses jobs have been created. USAID is also working with business start-ups, entrepreneurs, and established companies to expand their business and employ more Afghans. Since 2011, USAID has helped facilitate \$1.86 million in private-sector loans to 575 businesswomen and provided over 3,500 women with vocational training and 1,200 women in business development. USAID is also working with established businesses like Sarallah Stone Cutting Company in Herat. By providing new marble calibrating and polishing machines, the company is expanding overall production volume and producing higher quality tiles, which are in high demand in domestic and international markets. Afghanistan has one of the largest untapped marble reserves in the world, presenting an enormous opportunity to expand this sector, and enhanced regional trade with Afghanistan's neighbors and beyond will fuel the sustained economic growth vital to the country's future.

##### *Infrastructure and Energy*

Through the provision of vital services to Afghans, infrastructure and energy projects are a fundamental base for national stability and a key component for domestic and regional development and connectivity. That is why USAID has helped Afghans increase supplies of reliable, affordable electricity; expand access to potable water; and design, build, and maintain roads.

In 2002, only six percent of Afghans had access to reliable electricity. Today, 29 percent are connected to the electricity grid. The Afghan Government, with help from USAID, established the country's electrical utility, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkaat (DABS), just six years ago. Today, DABS no longer receives a subsidy from the Afghan government and has posted a profit each year since 2011. USAID is supporting DABS to complete the work required so that by late Fall 2016, the Kajaki Hydropower Station will be fully operational. The additional electricity is vital to stability and economic development in southern Afghanistan, and it will improve the quality of life for residents in Kandahar and Helmand. The full operation of Kajaki

fulfills longstanding commitments to southern Afghanistan by both the Afghan and U.S. Governments.

#### *Democracy and Governance*

Strengthened democracy and governance is crucial to promoting the rule of law, combatting corruption, and encouraging economic growth. USAID is positioned to continue helping Afghan electoral institutions move forward on electoral planning and reform efforts, while also preparing to rapidly provide more comprehensive operational assistance once an election timeline and framework have been established by the Unity Government.

USAID democracy and governance programs complement efforts by the U.S. Department of Defense to train and build the capacity of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). USAID creates an enabling environment that supports the ANDSF through rule of law programs, judicial reform efforts and capacity and expertise-building within relevant ministries. This whole-of-government approach helps create civilian and security services that are responsive to Afghan citizens, undercutting claims to authority by Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other insurgent groups.

Under the leadership of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah, the Afghan Unity Government is taking measures to reduce corruption and enhance transparency in public sector and parastatal institutions. This summer, with support from USAID, the Afghan Customs Department and Afghanistan Bank implemented the first electronic payment system for customs duties. The e-payment system automates collection of customs duties at border crossings, like Mazar-i-Sharif which is Afghanistan's gateway to trade in Central Asia, and eliminates the need for traders to carry cash, thus reducing opportunities for corruption. Earlier this year, the Minister of Public Health invited the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee to review the government ministry under his direction. The thorough, and public, analysis identified opportunities for tackling corruption at the ministry that are now being addressed by the government. Two additional ministries have publicly stated their interest to conduct similar anti-corruption analyses of their ministries.

#### *Health and Education*

In 2001, few Afghans had access to trained healthcare providers; today, approximately 57 percent of the population lives within a one-hour walk of a health facility, enabling Afghans to seek medical attention from trained staff and obtain needed medicines. According to the USAID-funded Afghan Demographic and Health Survey, the under-five mortality rate has decreased from 87 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 55 in 2015. In cooperation with the Afghan Ministry of Public Health, USAID has trained more than 2,000 women in midwifery.

Huge strides have been made in access to education in Afghanistan. According to the Ministry of Education, over nine million students have enrolled in school, including nearly 3.5 million girls. University enrollment increased from 8,000 in 2001 to 174,000 in 2015. USAID supports improving the quality of basic education by helping to train more than 154,000 Ministry of Education teachers, including more than 54,000 women, and by distributing more than 130 million textbooks to schools. USAID has helped over 84,000 Afghan girls attend community-based education classes, eliminating the need for the girls to travel long distances to attend school.

#### *Women and Girls*

Women and girls in Afghanistan are integral to ensuring the country's future stability and prosperity. In addition to tremendous improvements for Afghan women and girls' access to education and health, USAID programs continue to implement gender-conscious programming as a cross-cutting priority across all development sectors. USAID is determined to ensure gains for women are sustained and opportunities for their development are enhanced.

In Afghanistan, USAID is implementing "Promote," a program that builds upon the achievements women and girls have made since 2001 by developing a cadre of 75,000 educated Afghan women between the ages of 18 and 30, and empowering them to fully participate in the economic, political, and civil society sectors of their nation. Programming under Promote supports women to establish or expand small-to medium-sized businesses; helps civil society organizations increase their knowledge, skills, and capacity to advocate on women's issues; facilitates fellowships with Afghan ministries to increase the number of women in the civil service; and provides management and leadership training to women in public, private and civil service sectors.

On July 7, USAID announced a commitment of \$25 million to the global Let Girls Learn Initiative. As part of a new partnership with the United Kingdom's Depart-

ment for International Development Girls Education Challenge, this support will help sustain a teacher apprenticeship program for adolescent girls.

In partnership with the Italian Development Cooperation, and through the World Health Organization, USAID is supporting work toward a Gender Based Violence protocol that will improve standards of care to survivors. An additional project will build awareness on trafficking and support protection services for victims.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

USAID remains committed to programs in Afghanistan that are effective, accountable, and sustainable, and the Agency takes oversight and accountability of its programs and use of U.S. taxpayer dollars very seriously. Afghanistan is a challenging environment, but USAID continues to refine and adapt programs in order to achieve the best possible results in the most efficient and cost effective manner. As it does around the world, in Afghanistan USAID employs rigorous oversight and monitoring to safeguard its programs from waste, fraud and abuse and to ensure that American investments in Afghanistan are achieving their intended impact. USAID adjusts or suspends projects if performance is not on track or oversight standards cannot be met.

Above and beyond the Agency's standard oversight measures, USAID has implemented steps in Afghanistan to prevent funds from being misused or diverted to malign actors. USAID created a multi-tiered monitoring approach that allows it to collect monitoring data from multiple sources, validate findings, and make better programmatic decisions. The levels of monitoring include: (1) direct observation by U.S. government personnel; (2) implementing partner reporting; (3) feedback from Afghan government officials and other donors; (4) local civil society organizations and beneficiaries; and (5) the use of third-party monitoring agents in the field. USAID has used the last measure—third-party monitors—to conduct nearly 33,000 visits to USAID sites or projects since 2011.

USAID also vets non-U.S. companies and non-U.S. key individuals for prime contractors, sub-contractors, grant recipients and sub-grantees to determine whether or not they are associated with known malign entities or individuals. Since the vetting program began in 2011, USAID has vetted 7,490 people and entities, determining 305 ineligible (a rate of about four percent) and kept approximately \$670 million from being awarded to those who did not meet vetting requirements.

#### CONCLUSION

Senators, when I first arrived in Kabul I found a city with no infrastructure, but with great hopes and aspirations. A population with very limited capacity, but with great passion and energy to learn. And a country with a bleak and painful past that was hoping for a brighter future. I'm proud of the work that we have been able to do in Afghanistan, with the unwavering support of the US Congress and the American people. Mothers and children are much less likely to die in or immediately after childbirth; more Afghans have access to healthcare, education, electricity, cellphone service and even the internet in their local communities. The Afghan education system—from primary school through university—is producing young Afghan women and men who are capable of contributing to society and to an economy in ways that were not imaginable in 2002. Afghan farmers are being trained and equipped with farming techniques that increase the quality and yield of their produce, and the Afghan Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock hopes Afghanistan can be food-secure in 5 years.

As USAID looks to Brussels and beyond, the Agency is committed to sustaining the significant development achievements made in partnership with the government and people of Afghanistan. USAID is determined to make every effort to safeguard taxpayer funds while ensuring development progress is sustained and led by a new generation of Afghans. Remember that development takes time: at fifteen years, our own fledgling country had just authored a Constitution; struggled mightily with debt and generating revenue; had not abolished slavery; nor given women the right to vote. So for the sake of both of our nations, the U.S. should be patient as we help the people of Afghanistan develop their state and their country.

As I complete my service in USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, I want to take this public opportunity to share that it has been an honor and a pleasure to serve in this capacity and work with the women and men of USAID and with the staff of our Missions in Kabul and Islamabad. I also want to thank Members of Congress and Congressional staff, from both sides of the aisle, for their time, commitment, and guidance on USAID's Mission in Afghanistan. This is especially true regarding those who have traveled to the region and met with USAID workers,

including the Afghans and Pakistanis who comprise our Foreign Service National staff.

Tomorrow William Hammink will be sworn in as Assistant to the Administrator for the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs. Having served as USAID's Mission Director to Afghanistan from 2013–2015, and in leadership roles throughout the agency and in nine Missions, Bill is exceptionally qualified to take the reins of this dynamic USAID portfolio. I know Bill looks forward to working with you soon after he is sworn into the position, and I am confident that I am leaving my position in good hands.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you, and we are certainly fortunate that both of you are here today, and we certainly deeply appreciate Ambassador Olson's service to our country.

I will say that for someone who has been involved in Afghanistan for 14 years and has committed to it in the way that you have, we are especially fortunate to have you here today.

I hope you will write a book, I really do, seriously, to help us think about engagements like this more fully in the future. I am sure the knowledge that you have, the experiences that you have gained, are invaluable. And while I had planned to focus on Afghanistan's other issues today, I look forward to seeking some of that advice today.

But thank you so much for being here.

Bill, I assume, is the gentleman sitting right behind you nodding his head. We welcome you.

And with that, I will turn to Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I join you in thanking both of our witnesses for their public service in extraordinarily challenging surroundings. I cannot imagine what you saw 15 years ago.

And we are all very concerned about what the light is at the end of this tunnel, and how long it is going to take in order to reach that, and how much more of our military and civilian efforts are going to be needed before the country is self-sufficient. And I hope we will get into those types of questions during this hearing.

But let me just focus on one or two issues that I want to make sure we follow up on.

Ambassador Olson, the last time we had a hearing, I talked about the pervasive problems of corruption. You acknowledged that is a serious problem within Afghanistan and indicated that the mutual accountability framework could be used to have greater accountability in this area.

Can you just update us as to what will be done, perhaps in Brussels, to make sure that we stay focused on achievable results in fighting corruption in Afghanistan?

Ambassador OLSON. Thank you, Senator.

Corruption does, indeed, continue to be an enormous challenge for Afghanistan, but I can tell you that the Government of Afghanistan, starting with President Ghani, takes this challenge very seriously.

First of all, let me say that our assistance to Afghanistan is conditioned, in particular the security assistance provided through defense channels, through the Combined Security Transition Command to Afghanistan, and includes specific measures to root out corruption and prevent corruption of contracting authorities such as fuel.

USAID, and I am sure my colleague, Larry, can talk quite about this, sponsors extensive anticorruption components.

On the political side of the house, the recent appointment of the attorney general, Mr. Hamidi, who has an excellent reputation in this area, is working to promote the rule of law and to take specific anticorruption measures.

In June of 2016, with the support of the U.S. Government, he administered applications for 25 vacancies to ensure that government positions are filled on merit. That is one small example.

The Afghan Government's anticorruption efforts have been backed by actions there. President Ghani has established a High Council for the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption, which met for the first time in August. He announced the establishment of an anticorruption justice center to—

Senator CARDIN. That is good. I know those areas are good.

There has been little activity by the anticorruption justice center to date, and I would just urge you that we, the United States in our capacity, continue to keep a very bright spotlight on these issues.

And I would personally ask you keep this committee informed as to progress made, not just on corruption and fighting corruption, but also on advancing the human rights issues. And we will, I am sure, during the course of this hearing—if not, we will—make sure it is available to you, our specific concerns.

Yes, I think those steps are good, but, to date, we have not seen enough evidence that it really is taking root. So we need to continue to make a major spotlight on it.

I have one more just administrative question. We have special bureaus for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Is it likely that that structure will continue indefinitely, or is there plans to integrate it into the normal bureaus at both State and USAID?

Ambassador OLSON. For the State Department, the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan will be continuing for the time being. I think Secretary Kerry and the leadership of the State Department will be making decisions about how this is presented to the incoming administration, the transition teams.

But for the time being, we continue to have the special representative's office.

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Sampler, you said that you had learned lessons over the last 14 years. I alluded to, what is the light at the end of the tunnel? And how much longer will it be before we can start to significantly turn over the responsibilities to the Afghan people?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, with respect to the light at the end of the tunnel, I would argue that there are literally millions of Afghans who see that light already and enjoy the benefits of the intervention that we made 15 years ago.

When we talk about the Taliban and when we talk about the conflict in Afghanistan, it is important to remember that well less than 5 percent of the population of Afghanistan is under the rule of the Taliban. Now that number fluctuates as the combat rolls around, but the vast majority of the Afghan people are living a much better life than they could ever have envisioned in 2002.

I take your point that that was not really what you were looking for, but in terms of the future of Afghanistan, one of the points that I like to make after doing this for 15 years is we are there. We need to continue to support Afghanistan. We need to make sure that these changes for women and girls and for young entrepreneurs are not rolled back, that the opportunities that we, with your support in 2002, began to create in Afghanistan are reaching fruition now.

And I would like to address a little bit of, as I answer that, your corruption question. You know, Ambassador Olson talked about some of the grand schemes and the strategic level things we are doing.

The U.S. Government is supporting something called the joint interagency Monitoring and Evaluation Commission for fighting corruption in Afghanistan, the MEC. And the MEC has reached agreement with six different ministries to do internal audits, and this is all on their own doing, to do internal audits of those ministries, looking for signs of corruption or vulnerabilities to corruption, and then working with those ministries to address them.

They have done this already with the Ministry of Public Health. I think it probably alarmed the minister that he was going to show all his dirty laundry in one of these open hearings. It was done at President Ghani's insistence, and it has been very productive.

Likewise, we have mechanisms in place to protect Government of Afghanistan programs we are supporting and to protect U.S. tax dollars.

So the corruption that you mention is endemic in Afghanistan, and, to be honest, it is endemic in most of the countries that USAID works in around the world. But we are configured to help prevent it, and we are in this for the long haul to help the Afghans combat it and ultimately defeat it.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I am just going to ask one question. I want to make some interjections.

I will make the observation that Ambassador Holbrooke's vision of the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan at the time, while certainly was the best we could make at the time, is different than we thought. And so I do think it is worthy of looking at this relationship and having a Pakistan-Afghanistan official because there is a lot of conflict there, and I would love to have your counsel off record as to whether that is still something that makes sense or actually breeds distrust by both countries, because of having this singular role. So I think that is worth discussing.

Larry Sampler, first of all, how much are we annually expending, the United States Government, on Afghanistan today?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, let me, in a broad sense we have spent \$21 billion—

The CHAIRMAN. But this year, how much will we expend?

Mr. SAMPLER. You have appropriated to us right at \$1 billion this year.

The CHAIRMAN. No, no, no, no. No, no.

Mr. SAMPLER. How much have we spent?

The CHAIRMAN. No. How much we spend each year in support. I am not talking about you at USAID. The U.S. Government, in general, support of the military, support of the security, their military, their security, and our, certainly—

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, I do not know the answer to that because I do not know what the military spends.

The CHAIRMAN. No. I am not talking about even our own military. I am talking about in support of their military.

Olson, do you want to answer that?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes, I mean, in broad terms, sir, the figure is about \$5 billion a year. I mean, we pay about \$4 billion a year in support of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and roughly \$1 billion in terms of civilian assistance.

The CHAIRMAN. And that doesn't include, of course, what we are spending on the troops that we have on the ground there.

I think the numbers are up close to \$10 billion a year, but I would love to be corrected.

My question, in getting to that, I did not think it would take that long, but is to ask someone who has been invested in the way that you are, who has seen his brothers and sisters killed, maimed, back here in many disabled positions, as a person, again, who sees the future there, but since you will not have this opportunity likely again, we are going to spend this kind of money, ad infinitum. I mean, 95 percent of Afghanistan's budget structure comes from donors, okay?

We know this is going to go on ad infinitum. I mean, there is no end to this in sight.

And I would just love for you to share with us, you did speak about some of the things that have transpired within the country, but as our citizens look at our national interests and they weigh \$10 billion a year ad infinitum, they weigh what has happened to military personnel and others who are so committed, the people like you who have done what they have done, how would you express the value of this to American citizens, since you are right there on the ground, as they look at these types of incursions, and how it affects our national interests?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, thank you for a very broad question. I appreciate the opportunity to respond, and I will yield to Rick as well for part of the remaining time, if you will permit it.

My response is this. The Human Development Index, which development professionals around the world use to rack and stack countries in where they stand in terms of human development needs, Afghanistan is 171st out of about 185 countries. So that puts them somewhere in the middle of the countries that we work in in Africa where our expenditures are nowhere near the \$5 billion mark, but they are very serious expenditures.

So I can make an argument as a development professional, or as just a humane person, that we are investing in Afghanistan to improve the quality-of-life for Afghanistan in ways that they desperately need.

Now, overlaying that with our national security interests, coming from a military background and a military background very much focused on countering insurgency, ungoverned spaces are the worst possible thing that we could allow to re-emerge.

So supporting the Government of Afghanistan in their ability to govern their own space, and to do that proactively to prevent insurgencies, rather than having to counter them, is, in my opinion, a good investment.

It is expensive to work in Afghanistan. It is a long way away. The roads are terrible. The airports are not terribly good. It costs a lot of money.

And every time I go home to Stone Mountain, Georgia, I have to explain to my 83-year-old father why this is more important than fixing the bridge out back—and Senator Isakson, I apologize—but fixing the bridge out back in Georgia.

How we spend this money in Afghanistan does make a difference, and it makes a difference in my home State of Georgia as well.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Barrasso?

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I share your concerns. I share concerns that Senator Cardin expressed with regard to corruption.

And I think you made a comment about writing a book. A book came out yesterday, and the book was called, "Corruption in Conflict." This is the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

What I hadn't realized is, it says, unlike other inspector generals, Congress created this Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction as an independent agency not housed inside any single department, and it is thus able to provide independent and objective oversight.

And if you go through it, as they have reported in today's Financial Times, today's Financial Times headline: "Afghan Corruption Worse After USAID Effort, Says Watchdog."

So when we talk about fixing a bridge in Georgia versus what has happened in Afghanistan, underneath it says, "Countless examples uncovered of funds going to waste in malpractice."

It says, "It is this endemic corruption that poses an existential threat to Afghanistan and to U.S. policy objectives."

So, Mr. Chairman, I want to just ask some questions based on what we see here, to have you comment on some of the things that are in the report that has just come out from the special inspector general.

So the inspector general concludes, and so I ask do you agree, quote, "Corruption undermined the U.S. mission in Afghanistan by fueling grievances against the Afghan Government and channeling material support to the insurgency," because we are talking about political objectives here, security objectives, trying to work the reconciliation with the Taliban.

So that is their quote, "Corruption undermined the U.S. mission in Afghanistan." Either one of you.

Ambassador OLSON. Yes. Thank you, Senator.

I think, first of all, we appreciate the work that the SIGAR has done, and we thank them for broaching the 15-year history with a lessons learned approach on corruption. And I do not think anyone would doubt that corruption is a huge challenge in Afghanistan. I

mean, President Ghani has himself acknowledged it as one of the foremost challenges.

I would just say that we agree with the analytical assessment that corruption undermines governance and can, in certain cases, even help to fuel the insurgency.

What I would say is that with the Ghani government, we have a committed partner on anticorruption. And President Ghani has taken a number of steps.

He took action to seek to finally clean up the Kabul Bank scandal, which was such a dramatic example of corruption and malfeasance. Last year, he canceled a huge fuel contract because of allegations of impropriety. And as my colleague Larry mentioned, he has set up the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, MEC, with outside experts, leading outside experts on anticorruption, who have come in to work on this.

So I think anyone would have to admit that this is a work in progress, but I think it is a dramatically different situation from what it was prior to 2014.

Senator BARRASSO. Well, I will go to you with the next quote from the report and ask you to comment on that. "The United States contributed to the growth of corruption by injecting tens of billions of dollars into the Afghan economy using flawed oversight and contracting practices, and partnering with malign power brokers."

I mean, that is from the report. So I would just ask you if you would want to comment on that, and your thoughts because of your long history. You have been to Afghanistan 60 times over the last 15 years. I mean, it is a remarkable commitment and service to the country. This is a concerning report.

Mr. SAMPLER. Yes. In general, I have gone on the record and under oath multiple times saying how much I appreciate the value of GAO inspectors general and the special inspector general.

What I will say about this report is I do not find it particularly helpful to be reminded that corruption is a problem. USAID identified corruption in Afghanistan in 2004. We did a fairly grand assessment of corruption in Afghanistan then, and it has been a part of our onward planning ever since.

I do very much appreciate every opportunity to bring attention to corruption in Afghanistan, because that is my remit. But USAID deals with problems very similar to this all over the world.

To your question about we created corruption by the infusion of money, one of the things from Mr. Sopko's remarks yesterday likened corruption to cancer. And I think that is a good analogy, because once it is in the system, it is really hard to remove. You have to catch it early because the remedies to eliminating cancer are incredibly painful and in some cases are more debilitating than the cancer itself.

For example, refusing to work with malign actors. Now, defining individuals as malign actors is its own problem that Ambassador Olson will deal with. But who you choose to deal with and not deal with creates enemies within the state and enemies to the state that in some cases are as much a threat as the cancer.

So Ambassador Mike McKinley, who is doing a fantastic job, must balance the support to the Government of Afghanistan as

they work to eradicate this cancer of corruption in the country with the political requirements to be as inclusive as he can to make sure that he is able to bring stability to his country.

I tell my staff all the time, if this were easy, the Boy Scouts would have done it 10 years ago. This continues to be something we wrestle with, but USAID does this well around the world and will continue to focus on it in Afghanistan.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired.

The CHAIRMAN. It is an interesting observation you make. The conflict that existed from the very beginning with President Karzai publicly alluding to the alleged suitcases of cash that were delivered to him by our intelligence agencies from day one and continued throughout his administration, according to him in public reports. These are alleged statements.

But it fuels the very thing that Senator Barrasso is alluding to and certainly undermines when people are so aware of it. When you have a President of a country publicly stating that we are delivering suitcases of cash, it really undermines our situation.

I understand the conflict that you are alluding to.

Senator Menendez?

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for your service.

I want to continue on Senator Barrasso's reference to the report. And I understand that some of these things are hard, but even Boy Scouts, especially when they are an Eagle Scout, can get some things done.

And so let's move on to some of the other major points that were—it says that we were slow, the U.S. Government is slow to recognize the magnitude of the problem, the role of corrupt patronage networks, the way it threatened core U.S. goals; that even when the United States acknowledged corruption as a strategic threat, security and political goals consistently trumped anticorruption actions; and when the United States sought to combat corruption, its efforts only saw limited success in the absence of sustained Afghan and U.S. political commitment.

So as someone who has been very supportive of our efforts here and its resources, this undermines my sense of commitment, because, you say, Mr. Sampler, that we recognized it in 2004. That is 12 years ago. So more than a decade later, I do not see a lot of greater success in this regard.

That is why, working with Chairman Corker, I authored legislation that the Senate passed in April to address many of these concerns that laid out this in a number of other quarterly reports as mandated by Congress. Almost all have indicated that, without addressing core governance issues, our efforts there will be a failure.

And at its core, the Afghanistan Accountability Act lays out a framework for the United States to take meaningful steps to work with our Afghan interlocutors to tackle the roots of corruption; to develop clear accountability benchmarks supporting the Afghan legal system; to better oversee property rights and asset management; and, in certain cases, impose specific penalties on persons who are knowingly involved in direct acts of mismanaging or misappropriating U.S. assistance.

Unfortunately, the House has not taken up this legislation yet. However, the essence of trying to establish sound metrics when we are talking about billions of dollars of the U.S. taxpayers' commitment to Afghanistan should not need an act of Congress at the end of the day, although I certainly will continue to push for that. So my questions are in this regard.

I do not get a sense that we have made progress in institutionalizing any of these commitments. We seem to have tried the capacity approach for the past 15 years. So it seems to me that while I have always heard we need to build capacity and accountability, I think it is time to look more seriously to the accountability side of this question.

And so my question to you is, are we making progress? And do not give me a generic answer. Give me specifics of institutionalizing these commitments.

How can we effectively hold those officials who engage in these practices accountable? And what is the threshold for taking real steps to improve good governance and develop anticorruption efforts?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, thank you for your question and for the attention that your legislation draws to this very thorny, very complicated issue of corruption.

I should note, when I mentioned that in 2004 we did a study of the state of corruption in Afghanistan, and discovered that corruption was, in fact, endemic, there were no institutions in place to fight it. They had had their emergency loya jirga. They had a constitutional loya jirga. They had not yet, I believe, at that time even had their first presidential election.

So the institutions being built in Afghanistan are nascent institutions even now.

I frequently, when I speak publicly, talk about the state of play in the United States when our Nation was 14 years old. We had not, of course, even dreamed of giving women the right to vote. You know, we had serious problems ourselves with collecting revenue, with managing our debt.

In Afghanistan, specifically things that have been done, I am very pleased with the work of the MEC. I mentioned it previously. Five ministries have signed up in an agreement with this Monitoring and Evaluation Committee that they will examine their own ministries and they will publicly air what is found in those examinations, and they will publicly address what they need to do to correct it.

Second example, the public utility, the Afghan equivalent of a Georgia Power or a Duke Power Company, when we were working with them to provide resources to help them build their electric grid, we identified I believe the number was 56 very specific vulnerabilities to corruption in the utility structure.

Now, again, this utility was created in 2009 basically from scratch. Its first 2 years it required significant federal subsidies from the Government of Afghanistan. It is now in the black and generating revenue that it reinvests.

They addressed all 56, or whatever the specific number was, of the vulnerabilities that we identified in a way that satisfied us, so we began giving them money.

That is an important point. We incentivize our investment in Afghan institutions by requiring them to make the necessary adjustments to meet Western standards.

The final point that I will make, Afghans are very upset with corruption. The Afghan public is very upset. The Asia Foundation survey every year raises the issue of corruption.

And the way that I respond when I talk to Afghans is there are two elements to fighting corruption, and a third observation.

The observation, it is going to take a decade. You cannot turn corruption around overnight.

The first requirement is strong institutions. President Ghani, as the Ambassador has alluded, is building those institutions.

And the second is political will. And the one thing that I think we have in spades now that we did not necessarily have before is political will, not just at the President's level, but among the young technocratic ministers and deputy ministers and office directors that he has appointed.

These are Afghans who do not want to tolerate corruption, but they need our help in rooting it out and preventing it.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, unless we see substantive, actual improvement—I mean, the MEC sounds like it is self-policing. And if they are true to their commitments, self-policing, I guess, can create a positive result. But I am not sure.

The point is that I do not know what the political will here in the United States will be to continue to support the Afghans in light of what is going on there with all this now. So we are well into over a decade of this type of commitment. If it takes another decade, I just do not know what the political will be here at the end of the day.

So the sooner they accelerate their actual actions, it doesn't have to be that they are going to be pure overnight, but that they are tangible and demonstrable and can be measured, then the better the political will will be here. Otherwise, persons like myself who have been supportive will have a totally different view.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your comments.

And I do hope that President Ghani's efforts every Saturday morning to himself sit down and micromanage the contract letting that is taking place, I hope they will bear fruit.

I think that Senator Menendez's point is right. I do know that Ghani is in a whole different place. You would think some low-level bureaucrat would be doing it, but he is doing it himself. And I hope that will bear fruit.

With that, Senator Isakson, who seems many times to have distinguished Georgians who are presenting, but thank you for being here.

Senator ISAKSON. We are very proud of the contributions all Georgians make.

Particularly, Mr. Sampler, we thank you very much for your service to the country and particularly the 15 years working in Afghanistan. It is a real tribute to you and a tribute to the country.

Are you going to be retiring to Georgia?

Mr. SAMPLER. Sir, I can only wish. I will be taking a position somewhere else in the country.

Senator ISAKSON. Well, if it ends up in Georgia, we would love to have you register to vote by October the 8th. [Laughter.]

Mr. SAMPLER. Be assured that you have my dad's vote.

Senator ISAKSON. Tell him anything we can do to help him, let us know.

You made a comment early on in your testimony, answering a question I think of Senator Corker, that we are there, talking about the work of USAID and what we have been doing in trying to get girls in school, change some of the things that need to be changed on the ground in Afghanistan.

And if we are there, in that definition, with the exception of some areas that are controlled I know in a minority way by the Taliban and others, is it going to take the \$5 billion that Mr. Olson referred to that we are investing into the Afghan military and the Afghan Government every year for us to stay there, in your definition of being there?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, thank you for letting me clarify.

I do not want to communicate in any what that we have finished our work in Afghanistan. As I indicated, they are still 171st out of 183 or 185 countries on the Human Development Index.

By being "there," what I mean is Afghans have seen the light at the end of the tunnel and there are Afghans who live a much better life than they did before.

The fact that we have been able to reduce, for example, maternal mortality by over 50 percent is a fantastic statistic in aid circles. But that 50 percent is still an incredibly large number, the remaining problems of maternal mortality. The number of midwives that we have provided to allow women to have safe births or at least accompanied births, which they did not have before, is a remarkable accomplishment.

And Afghan women would say this is tremendous, but it is not yet a standard that we should be satisfied with.

I cannot comment on what the costs will be in the years going forward. I think, in Afghanistan, everything is tied to reconciliation and to the resolution of the ongoing conflict. But I do think that as a development professional, and as my work in the past years on planning for the future, I would see USAID being engaged in Afghanistan in a meaningful way for a number of years, as long as we enjoy the support of the U.S. Congress and the U.S. people.

Senator ISAKSON. On that point, one of the things that I was hoping I could point to, and you kind of led me to that point, I hope your successor, who I think is behind you—is that correct? We wish your successor the very best of luck in his endeavors.

One of the things we need is for you all to be looking to the future in terms of answering that question of what it is going to take from us to support what you have done so far and to sustain it in the country of Afghanistan.

We learned in Iraq with Provincial Reconstruction Teams, soft power, use of the United States military, a tremendous investment, we brought Iraq to peace. They wrote a constitution. They voted three times. And then we left and the support mechanism left, and Iraq became a headquarters for ISIL. We do not want the same thing to happen in Afghanistan.

So knowing what road map it is going to take with honest assessment, to keep the success you have made and build on it, is going to be important for us to know. And I hope your successor will work with us, giving us some idea of what that really will be.

Mr. Olson, I believe the ISIL affiliate in Afghanistan is called ISKP. Is that correct?

Ambassador OLSON. That is correct, sir.

Senator ISAKSON. What is their strength in Afghanistan?

Ambassador OLSON. We believe that they have a few thousand fighters, 1,500 to 2,500, mostly concentrated in Nangarhar Province in the east. They are actively being fought against by the Government of Afghanistan, and, of course, our own forces are carrying out airstrikes against them.

Senator ISAKSON. Are they coordinated in any way with the Taliban?

Ambassador OLSON. No, sir. In fact, the Taliban and Daesh have been fighting each other, at least in Nangarhar Province. They have not, to the best of our knowledge, joined forces. They oppose each other.

Senator ISAKSON. Do they have a stated goal, Daesh? Do they want to just disrupt Afghanistan? Or do they have a goal that they want to take Afghanistan over?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, I think one of the differences between the Taliban and Daesh is that Daesh has, in fact, a global agenda, the advancement of the caliphate, and the Taliban traditionally has focused its objectives purely on Afghanistan and has not had extraterritorial ambitions.

I do think that it is important to note that Daesh in Afghanistan is largely the result of TTP. That is to say, Pakistani Taliban people who are pushed out of North Waziristan with the successful operations Pakistanis have conducted in North Waziristan, they went to the other side of the border, and many of them have sworn allegiance to Daesh. And that is, in many ways, the basis of the organization in Afghanistan.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you for your answer, and thanks to both of you for your service to the country.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could interject, is it still the stated goal of the administration and of Ghani himself to solve the internal differences that exist there through an inclusion, a negotiated inclusion, of the Taliban in the government?

Ambassador OLSON. Senator, yes. We do believe that, ultimately, the peace of Afghanistan will require a political settlement. And I think the way I look at it is there is a very longstanding conflict in Afghanistan that has been going for 40 years, and the sides have changed considerably over those decades.

But at the core, there is an internal conflict about the future of Afghanistan that is going to have to result by Afghans talking to Afghans.

That is not to suggest there is not an external element. There certainly is, and I would readily concede that.

But our belief is that it will be necessary to bring about a political settlement to have the Taliban come to the table, and this is why we have repeatedly called for, both unilaterally but also

through various multilateral mechanisms, for the Taliban to come to the table.

Unfortunately, they have so far not been prepared to do that. This was an important factor in the President's decision to take the action that he did against Mullah Mansour earlier in the summer.

So we continue to believe that that will be the way forward, and that is the belief of President Ghani as well.

The CHAIRMAN. I look forward to following that up on the second round.

I will say that while I abhor Pakistan's activities and find their duplicity hard to take, and my sense is you are going to see a lessening degree of support for Pakistan over time as a result, in the many ways, because they know that our end goal is to negotiate with the Taliban, that feeds some of the duplicity they are carrying out too because they are hedging their bets.

But with that, Senator Udall?

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Chairman Corker.

And thank you both for your service in what is an awful difficult situation there in Afghanistan.

Mr. Sampler, you used the metaphor that corruption is like a cancer, and as you know, when we tackle a cancer, we have to do it very quickly or the cancer wins. And I just am a little bit disturbed when we talk in terms of 10 years and long periods of time, in terms of getting hold of corruption and really knocking it out.

And one of the areas that it seems to me that is the most effective is removing people from office, prosecuting officials, letting people know there is a deterrent, a really strong deterrent.

Can you tell us how many people have been removed from office, how many people have been prosecuted? Is there a strong prosecutorial agency? Are they reviewing cases?

You know, we have had a number of years, as you have pointed out, that we have known the corruption is there. But what is actually happening on the ground in terms of acting upon the individuals. As the chairman talked about, suitcases of cash and all of those kinds of things, if that is happening, something ought to be done about it in terms of the institutions there.

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, thank you for the question and the observation.

I have learned in my last hearing, I will not ever in hearings again use metaphors because they can get out of your control quickly.

Your point about catching corruption early is correct, and I would argue especially at the higher levels of government. Leadership leads by example. And if there are in the higher echelons of government corrupt officials, that breeds corruption and it trains younger officials to be corrupt in their own right when it becomes their term.

One of the things that President Ghani has done quickly in his term of office is he has seized the reins of corruption at the senior levels to the best that he can, recognizing, as I alluded to earlier, that he has challenges with respect to inclusive governance, and there are political consequences for firing certain individuals that he has to consider, but he has done it.

Senator, I am happy to take as a QFR your specific question about numbers of individuals. I do know we have that. I do not have it on the tip of my tongue.

But, in a general sense, President Ghani has relieved, I believe the number is over 30 customs officials in a specific instance where he learned of endemic corruption. And he has created panels within the parliament, both a general parliamentary panel on corruption and a women's parliamentary council on corruption, that is also empowered to take action.

But I will take details as a QFR.

Senator UDALL. Yes.

Ambassador Olson?

Ambassador OLSON. If I may just add one point?

President Ghani has also removed more than 90 generals from the Ministry of Defense rolls. Now that was not necessarily specific for corruption, but the individuals were removed for inefficiency and ineffectiveness. But I think it does help to establish the principle of accountability that is so important to anticorruption efforts.

Senator UDALL. Has anybody gone to jail?

Ambassador OLSON. There are individuals from Kabul Bank who are in jail, yes.

Senator UDALL. Great.

Now the whole issue of corruption, it raises the question: What is more of a threat to the long-term stability of Afghanistan? Is it the current inability of the Afghan Government to deal with its own internal struggles, i.e., corruption, or is it ISIS, Al Qaeda, the other group you mentioned, or the Taliban? How do you see that, in terms of the long-term stability?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, I think that there is no question that what preoccupies most Afghans on a day-to-day basis, and what preoccupies the government, is the security threat from the insurgency, that is to say from the Taliban.

I think that, overall, the Taliban have thrown everything they could at the government for 2 years now, for two fighting seasons, 2015 and 2016, and they have not succeeded. They did briefly take Kunduz, but they have not taken any provincial capitals this year. And the Afghan forces have been fighting back very effectively.

Given the effectiveness of the Afghan defense forces, I think that the Taliban have resorted to outrageous terrorist attacks in the cities, which, of course, garner enormous attention. But those are, generally speaking, against very soft targets.

So I think that the people of Afghanistan are genuinely concerned about the insurgency. I think they would see that as the first and foremost amongst the threats. It is also one of the reasons that there is such a yearning for peace in Afghanistan.

Senator UDALL. Thank you very much. Thanks for your service.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Flake?

Senator FLAKE. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

A couple of years ago in the House, myself and another Member on the Government Reform Committee looked into some of the contracts that we had with Afghanistan. And at that time, a big percentage of the funding that was going were trucking contracts with

the Afghans for movement of fuel and supplies to forward operating bases, in particular.

With a diminished presence there, that requirement has gone down quite a bit, I understand. But that was identified as an area of deep concern, I know, at that point.

The allegiance of those with whom we were contracting, basically to protect our supplies moving forward and to move those supplies, was fleeting at best, to put it mildly. With Taliban one day, and with us the next, it seemed.

Is that still a concern? And how much or what percentage of the funding with regard to defense funding is still going in that direction? I know you may not be aware of some of these figures, but can you give me the best estimate you can?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, Senator, with regard to Department of Defense funding, I would have to take that question and get back to you because that is obviously the responsibility of my colleagues at the Department of Defense.

What I can tell you is, and I was the assistance coordinator at the U.S. Embassy during the time I think you are talking about, and there was a great deal of concern about contracting, and efforts were made to greatly improve vetting of the various contracts to make sure that no U.S. funding was falling into the hands of malign actors.

As you correctly state, that is, I think, less of an issue now in part because of the diminished size of U.S. forces. I would say there continues to be a great emphasis on fuel. And I know that General Nicholson has spent a lot of time addressing the question of fuel contracts to ensure that they are completely clean and administered in a way that doesn't encourage any corruption.

But of course, I would have to refer you to the Department of Defense for the specifics on those particular contracts.

Senator FLAKE. Yes?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, with your permission, I will add, in specific response to some of the early issues, the U.S. Government developed programs of what we call vetting, as the Ambassador alluded to, and I can give you numbers on vetting since 2011.

USAID specifically has vetted 7,318 potential partners to receive our funding since March of 2011. And from that, 300 have been determined ineligible.

Now that may not mean they were criminals, but it means that we found something that made them not eligible to receive our funding. And the amount of money that may have protected is in excess of \$670 million.

So we took the threat of that particular corruption very seriously and now systemically across the government, and I might add in other countries as well, we are looking at how we examine the backgrounds of the individuals in these organizations with which we work.

Senator FLAKE. Well, thank you. The concern was, and this applies—obviously, the numbers are bigger on the defense side, but it applies to other contracts as well. The concern at that time was that so much of that funding was actually being used against us later.

Like I said, these were big numbers, huge numbers in terms of these contracts.

But I am pleased that it seems the vetting process has been stepped up, because it was quite clear at that point that a lot of the money used to acquire weapons and to launch attacks was actually U.S. money that had been turned around because of insufficient vetting.

And I understand you have to deal with unsavory actors here a lot, less so now with the diminished presence. But I just hope that we are making sure that our funding ends up where we want it to go and not being used against us.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Murphy?

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both very much for your incredible service.

Ambassador Olson, we often use the number of 8,400 U.S. troops to talk about our presence inside that country. But for any of us that have spent time there, and, of course, you, well know that that number of U.S. support personnel is actually much larger. We obviously have a big nonmilitary civilian contracting footprint.

Do you know offhand what the number is of U.S.-supported or U.S.-paid-for personnel that are on the ground today in Afghanistan, beyond just that number of 8,400 troops?

Ambassador OLSON. No, Senator, I do not have a number for the number of contractors who would be supporting either DOD or State. I can give you the numbers for the U.S. Embassy. You have about 670 people, Americans at the U.S. Embassy, in addition to the 9,800 who are serving with the U.S. military.

But we would have to get back to you on the total number of contracts there.

Senator MURPHY. I simply raise it because I think we use the wrong metric when we try to understand our presence there. We have transferred some fairly significant functions away from U.S. troops to private contractors who are doing things that troops used to do there. And so our footprint is much bigger, and we, frankly, have a lot more Americans at risk than just that number 8,400.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could, if you do not object? Would the order of magnitude be maybe triple the number that we have military, just to give an order of magnitude?

Ambassador OLSON. Senator, I am really reluctant to guess on this number. I do not have a sense—

The CHAIRMAN. I apologize.

Ambassador OLSON [continuing]. Of the number of contractors.

The CHAIRMAN. My guess is that would be a minimum.

Senator MURPHY. That is my guess.

Ambassador, can you talk about what you see as the future vision for U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, whether you see this as a movement toward a day in which there are no U.S. troops, no U.S. military presence? Or should we be thinking about Afghanistan more like South Korea, in which we are going to have a constant presence there to help underwrite and help advise the Afghan military forces? And what is your recommendation to the administration on that question?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes. Well, I think as we are thinking about transitions of administrations, of course these are the questions that will come to the fore. And President Obama, with his decision on keeping 8,400 troops in place, wanted to leave as much room as possible for his successor to make decisions about overall levels of U.S. troops.

I think that I will give you my own personal view that there are essentially two models, I would say, for how we can be looking at the future. One of them is essentially a long war in which we do have a long commitment of some number of troops, whatever that number may be I think would be open to debate. But the other option is to pursue a political settlement, is to pursue reconciliation.

I do not think that that is necessarily something that needs to be done on an immediate time frame, and it certainly needs to be done in accordance with our core principles. And we have established those with regard to reconciliation, that any agreement has to, at the end of the day, involve the Taliban breaking with Al Qaeda and international terrorism; with ceasing violence; and with coming under the Afghan constitution, including respect for minorities and women.

So I think that, if I may, just thinking in terms of future military presence, I think the way we should be thinking about this is that our military hardening of the Afghan state puts them in a position to arrive at a political settlement that safeguards the investments that we have made.

Senator MURPHY. But that assumes that the Taliban is interested in a political solution.

Do you worry that it is just simply not in the DNA of the Taliban to compromise, that we are not talking about a political party? We are talking about a social, cultural, and religious movement that may be totally incapable of doing what we are asking them to do, which is essentially get one-quarter or one-half of what they want, to power share.

That doesn't suggest to me the kind of organization that really, in the end, is capable of entering into a political settlement. And if that is the case, then a strategy which assumes that eventually they will fold in is one that will never turn out the way we want it to.

Ambassador OLSON. If I may, Senator, I think that is an excellent question, and I think we do not know the answer to the question.

I would say that, as a diplomat, this is a proposition that we would need to test, whether the Taliban are prepared to come to the table and to talk.

What I would say is that there is an enormous war weariness in Afghanistan on both sides, and I think that is very evident. It is evident amongst the Afghan people who are, I think, absolutely ready for a peace settlement and for reconciliation. And if that widespread desire can be translated into attitudes on the part of the Taliban that can be changed, I think there may be some ground.

But it is a proposition that has to be tested, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Our staff leaned up and said they felt the number was probably between 80,000 to 100,000, of additional security, of contractors. If you would get back with us with that number, it would be good.

In saying that, I want to say, personally, I lobbied the White House to keep the numbers of troops that we had there. I am glad the President came up with a number that I think will keep stability there. I appreciated the additional authorities that were given to the military to give close air support to the Afghan military when necessary. I appreciated the authorities to go against Al Qaeda that did not exist a year or so ago.

So I do not want any of the questions that I am asking to indicate anything other than my support for those decisions that have been made.

I think Ghani is generally a good man and, like all of us, has flaws. But I am glad that we have someone who does care about corruption. And he is more of a technocrat and certainly understands the ways of the world and the IMF and other places. And I think Abdullah has significant political skills as a human being and just interrelationship kinds of skills.

That said, again, I want to go back to some of the questions I asked Mr. Sampler earlier.

I mean, regardless of political reconciliation, and I share some of the concerns that Senator Murphy just laid out, I mean when we created this Afghan military and Afghan police, we knew that ad infinitum we were going to be pouring in billions and billions of dollars, even with political reconciliation occurring.

I mean, we have a country, as you have mentioned, that is one of the poorest in the world. There is all this utopic discussion about the minerals they have in the ground, which has been utopia for decades. It is not going to happen in my lifetime, I know. And I just think it is better for the American people for us to understand that once you undertake an effort like this, you are talking billions and billions and billions and billions of U.S. dollars every single year.

And so I would get back to, again, somebody who I think is a true patriot, Mr. Sampler. And just as we learn about this, and obviously it is affecting the American people when they see Afghanistan, when they see Iraq, and there is obviously a change of thinking in our country among the American people. Those of us who are policymakers obviously want to always continue to pursue our national interests, but we understand the country is changing, or at least has for a while.

How would you assess, when we go into a place like Afghanistan and we determine what we are going to do?

George Bush 41, President Bush 41, determined when he went in in Desert Storm that there was a limited mission, and once that was accomplished he stepped back out.

Bush 43 determined that mission to be something very different in Afghanistan and Iraq.

You are seeing on the ground the effort that it takes for this transformation, and certainly good things have occurred. But how should we begin to think in a more sophisticated way on the front end about these types of engagements, based on what you have learned over the last 14 or 15 years?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, again, thank you for the question.

The observation I would make, and I make it coming from a Special Forces background, is it is much cheaper and much better and more humane to prevent insurgencies than it is to go in and try to clean them up.

In Afghanistan, one of the reasons I am such an ardent supporter for continuing our engagement is we have seen firsthand the consequences of walking away from this region. It was the Taliban, and it was 30 years of civil war, and it spawned a breeding ground for Al Qaeda, from which they attacked the United States.

So I am an ardent supporter of pursuing stability in places like Afghanistan. One of the things I have pledged the agency to continue to work on with them is, what should we have learned about how we do this the next time around, wherever it might be in the world? As an agency and as in interagency, what must we be better at to make sure that we are as prepared as we can be to bring all the instruments of national power to bear to make sure we find the most economical and the most effective ways to do this.

But I really appreciate your observation with respect to the time that is required. You may be able to go into Afghanistan, as we did in 2001, and topple the government there very quickly. But you cannot rebuild the state in an equally quick period of time.

And there is a further confusion in some of the community of interest, that if you double the amount of money you spend, you will, therefore, double the rate of change in the host national government. And I appreciate, too, the growing recognition that that is just not true.

So I guess I would argue for a comprehensive whole-of-government approach that really does use all the instruments of our national power, and then the strategic patience, as you have indicated, to be willing to stay the course and make sure that the changes we make are permanent.

I worked in Bosnia in 1995 and 1996 when Richard Holbrooke brokered that peace agreement. And at the time, we were very pessimistic. And Bosnia certainly is not covering itself in glory. The Balkans is a tough place to live and work still. But it is a governed space, and it is getting better, and the people there live better lives now than they did in 1993.

If that is all we can achieve in Afghanistan, that might be enough for the short run. But I think we need to stay the course to make sure that the gains Afghans have made and the governance that they are beginning to provide is permanent and not reversible.

The CHAIRMAN. Now I am going to turn to Senator Shaheen, who I know came from another committee meeting.

I just will make the observation that I think part of entering these conflicts that we know are going to go on for decades—I mean what we have done in our country is do so and not pay for it. I mean what we have really done is made sure that future generations will pay for this, which to me is inherently immoral.

And it seems to me on the front end of these, a decision needs to be made if we know we are going to be there spending \$10 billion a year ad infinitum, that we also create some way through cuts in other government services, which obviously the American

people would pay attention to, or in some other ways, revenues, to pay for these undertakings, because we are not just committing to something for a long time. Each year, most of these resources are being piled on the back of our young people that, down the road, are going to pay the price, not us, but people down the road.

With that, Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would agree. I think you point out that what we have done is we have let the American people think that we can do these kinds of interventions without any cost to America, and that is a dangerous precedent to set.

But I want to begin by thanking you, Ambassador Olson and Mr. Sampler, for your service in Afghanistan and to the country, and wish you well in whatever you are doing next.

I have really two questions. My first is a very specific one.

As I know you both know, without any action from Congress to authorize additional visas for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program, not only will that program expire but thousands of Afghans who have provided valuable service to our Embassy there, to our men and women who have served, will be denied access to this country and be exposed, themselves and their families, to great danger. Many of them already are.

So I want to ask both of you if you could talk about how important it is for Congress to take action to extend the SIV program for Afghans who are still in the pipeline, and to talk about what a difference that has made to our mission there on the ground.

So, Ambassador Olson, do you want to begin?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes. Thank you, Senator, for your question.

Let me say that the State Department is fully committed to the Special Immigrant Visa program. We consider it, frankly, a moral responsibility to our employees who have been prepared to put their lives at risk by their association with us.

And, Senator, you are indeed correct that without an infusion of visa numbers, we will very shortly be exhausting the ability to issue visas, whether it is to individuals who served with our Armed Forces or our locally engaged staff at the U.S. mission.

So I would not offer any specific commentary on the various pieces of legislation that are currently under consideration, except to note that we do believe the need is real and would encourage the Senate and the House to act on it.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Sampler, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. SAMPLER. Yes, ma'am. I will endorse the Ambassador's observation.

I will say that I look forward to the day when the Afghans do not feel the need to flee Afghanistan. The brain drain that this creates among not just the interpreters but the professional staff at our Embassy who leave after serving just 2 years and are now in the United States is significant. I mean, it has been discussed in the Government of Afghanistan that as soon as we can reverse the security concerns and give these people a sense of confidence that they can stay, that will, I think, be a significant success.

But in the short run, I very much support the SIV program. I have colleagues who have worked with and for me in Afghanistan

who are either in the United States now or hope to be because of the SIV program. And so I very much appreciate that Congress is willing to offer this and the willingness to extend it.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you both, and I do appreciate the efforts of the State Department to make sure that this program has worked and worked more expeditiously to help those who are in real danger.

And it is disappointing to me that we have had a few people in the Senate and in the House who have blocked something that has been very important to our efforts on the ground in Afghanistan.

My second question is really a much broader one. Just reading and listening to media reports in the last months about discord between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah; about Taliban incursions into Helmand and into Nangarhar provinces; about the recent very high profile death of one of the police chiefs who, at least from all news reports, was not corrupt and who was working hard to address the dangers of the Taliban, it is hard to read all of those reports and have a rosy view of the good work that has gone on in Afghanistan.

And I appreciate both of you talking about progress that has been made, but it does raise concerns about what the future holds. And so I wonder if you could talk about how we should view the future, given some of the reports of what we are seeing?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes. Thank you, Senator.

I agree with you that it is important not to be rosy eyed on this, but I do think that, in particular, the security situation is not quite as dire as it is sometimes presented through media reports. And I am not saying that to be critical of the media, but it is just simply the nature of the news cycles.

The fact is the Taliban for the last 2 years has thrown everything it had against the Afghan forces. And with the exception of the brief fall of Kunduz last fall, the Afghan forces have held.

In fact, under General Nicholson's leadership, they have taken much more offensive actions and are much more mobile and less tied to checkpoints. Many of the incidents that you are describing are actually the overrunning of checkpoints.

For instance, in Urozgan Province recently, there were reports that the capital Tarinkot had fallen. That was not true. What had happened is certain checkpoints on the outskirts of Tarinkot, which is a town up in the hills and surrounded by narrow roads leading in, had fallen to the Taliban. But the city itself was never actually under any kind of direct threat.

That said, the fighting has been serious, especially in Helmand and in parts of the north.

But again, the key parts of Helmand, that is to say the populated districts, the capital, the areas around the Ring Road, have continued to hold.

And I think that the Taliban do control certain parts of Afghanistan. That is indisputable. But what they control are primarily rural areas with very low population densities and remote areas. These are not population centers.

If you look at the proportion of the country that the Taliban hold in terms of population, it is really not very significant. And this is, of course, given that the five major cities of Afghanistan have over

the course of the past 15 years become huge cities in Afghan standards, Kabul probably being 2 million to 5 million people when it was traditionally a city of 200,000.

So I do not want to be overly optimistic, but I do think that the Afghan forces are holding, despite some real casualties. And with our continued support, we believe that they will be able to withstand whatever the Taliban has been throwing against them.

On the question of the government of national unity, it is a challenge. This is not a country that has a tradition of coalition government ever. It has a long tradition, frankly, of very authoritarian, centralized, one-person rule. And so there are challenges to making the government of national unity work. And there are some recurrent challenges that have come up recently, of which I am sure you are aware.

Our sense is that both President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, with whom—I have been out to Kabul twice within the past month. I have met with both of them repeatedly. My sense is they both recognize the importance of unity, of inclusive government.

There are some tough political issues, frankly, that divide them, but we are working with them to continue to keep the process on track.

Senator SHAHEEN. Can I ask a follow-up?

The CHAIRMAN. Sure.

Senator SHAHEEN. You talked about the significant losses to the Afghan forces, and I have heard that they have lost thousands of people. So how much is this affecting their ability to continue to recruit and to replace all of those people who have been lost?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, Senator, I do not mean to duck the question, but it would probably be a question that would need to be referred to my DOD colleagues. I think they would probably have the precise numbers on that.

My sense, from having been out there and from having talked repeatedly to General Nicholson and others, is that while the casualties are severe—first of all, they are not as significant as the casualties that the Taliban are taking. I mean, I think that is an important point to remember, that the Taliban casualties are particularly severe.

And so far, I think it is safe to say that the recruitment efforts have not been hampered, and there is some important advantages that the Afghan forces have right now, particularly the use of air power, which gives them a big advantage and a morale boost over the Taliban. The Afghans now are flying A-29 Super Tucanos. The Afghan Air Force is actually conducting airstrikes. And of course, we have provided helicopters, MD-530s, which are being used quite effectively. And I think that has a really important effect on the battlefield because, of course, that means that their enemy cannot mass. And I think it also is a great boost to the morale.

Senator SHAHEEN. Okay. So I have a State Department question for you. Do we expect President Ghani to call parliamentary elections?

Ambassador OLSON. The timing of elections will have to be up to the Afghan Government to decide.

We think what is really important in the near term is that the Government of Afghanistan agree on what electoral reforms are ab-

olutely necessary to conduct elections as soon as possible, because I think there is a widespread consensus that, after the 2014 election, reforms are necessary. There are issues that are under consideration right now, consideration of electronic I.D. cards, of the question of constituencies. And naturally, constituencies raise questions of redistricting, which is as controversial in Afghanistan as it is in the United States.

So these are important issues that they are going to have to get through. But we think the important thing is for them to actually come up with a reform package and agree on it.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. I will say, in reference to one of your questions, there is a 30 percent turnover rate in the military each year. So the Special Forces, I think, have done an outstanding job at performing, but the rest of the regular Afghan military does have significant turnover.

As far as the gains that have been made, a big part of that has been with the close air support that we have been able to give too. Is that correct?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes, that is correct, sir. Of course, I am well outside my lane, in terms of offering military—

The CHAIRMAN. You are only there because the civilian military leaders just couldn't get it together, unfortunately.

But that is true, what I just said, right?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes, sir. General Nicholson, of course, has under his authorities the ability to provide air support to carry out a strategic effect, and he has been using those authorities quite effectively.

The CHAIRMAN. And those are new authorities.

Ambassador OLSON. That is correct, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. When do we expect the Afghans themselves—I know that they are gaining ground as it relates to the air service, but when will we expect they can totally displace us, if you will, on those types of activities?

Ambassador OLSON. Sir, I would really think that I could not answer that question. That would be one for my Air Force colleagues, who are working this issue directly, but we will be happy to take it back and try to get you an answer.

The CHAIRMAN. Would it be your observation that, in the event the loya jirga were to take up the issue of having a CEO and a President today, that it is likely they would vote that down?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, the question of the loya jirga is a little bit of a complicated one because, of course, the political agreement calls for one, but it called for a constitutional loya jirga, which would require first holding parliamentary elections.

And as I was discussing with Senator Shaheen, there are challenges to carrying out parliamentary elections, and that is why they have not taken place so far and why the loya jirga has not come about.

The CHAIRMAN. I want to understand. My understanding was that possibly one of the reasons we are not going ahead with the parliamentary piece is we know that, to the extent it was constituted, the loya jirga, that, in fact, this shotgun marriage that we have created would not exist and would fall apart. So it is the se-

quence that you outlined and not concerns about what the aftermath might be.

Ambassador OLSON. Yes, sir. Well, first of all, I mean, these are Afghan decisions about whether or not to convene a loya jirga.

The CHAIRMAN. I understand that.

Ambassador OLSON. I do not think that the calculation that this would proceed one way or the other was the factor. I think it was simply the difficulty of reaching consensus on the electoral reforms, and therefore agreeing on the electoral date, that actually prevented the convening of a loya jirga.

And it is important to emphasize I am talking about a constitutional loya jirga. There also is the option of a traditional loya jirga, which is much less predictable, in terms of its possible outcomes.

The CHAIRMAN. And I understand President Karzai is playing a nefarious role in these issues. Is that correct?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, President Karzai has occasionally signaled that he—well, he has signaled that he would favor a traditional loya jirga. I think that we would have concerns about a traditional loya jirga. But at the end of the day, this is up to the Afghans to decide.

The CHAIRMAN. Just one last question. I can tell Senator Cardin wants to close with some other comments and questions.

So the role that you play is—first of all, you being in this post is going to end after many, many years of distinguished service, which we are all grateful for. But it does seem to me that now the whole notion of this AfPak, if you will—the scenario that we envisioned at the time is very different today.

I would love for you, if you would, on your way out the door, to talk about the strengths of that, of having a person in this position and some of the complexities. Again, I would think that in some ways it breeds distrust by both countries for someone in your position, or could.

I just wonder if you might make some observations, knowing that others will decide whether this position continues?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, thank you, Senator, for giving me the chance to address this. It is an important issue.

I do think having an office like mine that is robustly resourced and staffed and able to deal with some of the highest priority issues in our foreign policy on a daily basis makes a good deal of sense.

Just to give you some examples, I in some ways am an equivalent to an Assistant Secretary of State, but I only focus on two countries, but this allows me to focus much more intensively.

As I mentioned, I have been out in Kabul twice in the last month. In the 9 months or so that I have been in this job, I have been out on a monthly basis almost to Kabul and Islamabad. And so that is a level of attention that I think an ordinary Assistant Secretary of State would probably not be able to attach to one or two countries.

But I have to say there are challenges to the structure as well. The challenge I think that we all come up against is the fact that Pakistan, in some ways, when it views itself, sees itself much more in terms of its relationship with India. And the fact that India and

Pakistan are, in the current structure, in separate bureaucratic domains can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

But let me just say that I work extremely closely and with great respect for my colleague Nisha Biswal, and we have made significant efforts to make sure that that seam is not problematic.

But I think that is a serious concern.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. I want to follow up on Islamabad and Pakistan.

Can you just share with us how helpful Pakistan is being in getting the Taliban involved in Afghanistan in the peace process, and particularly how their inconsistent—I am being generous right now—position in regard to the Haqqani network is impacting the ability to have a meaningful peace process in Afghanistan?

Ambassador OLSON. Yes. Thank you, Senator.

Well, first of all, I continue to believe that Pakistan is at a strategic crossroads, and it can choose either to act against the extremists who have a safe haven on its territory and threaten its neighbor, or it can continue to ignore this problem.

If it chooses the former course of action, cracking down on the terrorists, it will build regional stability, enhance its relations with its neighbors and with the United States.

If it chooses the latter, it will face, it seems to me, increasing isolation and estrangement from international—

Senator CARDIN. Have they made this choice? We have been talking about this for a considerable period of time. And at least it seems like—again, I am going to be somewhat kind on this. They seem to be taking both paths at the present time. But many here believe they have already made their decision, that they will not go after Haqqani and may even allow them to continue to operate for whatever reasons. So they have chosen, in many respects, not to go after all terrorist activities.

If you talk to the Indians, they will tell you the same thing is true in regard to the networks against India, terrorist organizations against India that are supported at least by their presence in Pakistan.

So I guess my question is, is the jury still out on Pakistan? And if it is, how do we influence it to make sure they make the right decision?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, I think that Pakistan has taken some actions against the Taliban. I mean, in the past few months, first of all, they did clean out North Waziristan, which was something that we had wanted for many years, including closing down—

Senator CARDIN. I agree with that, but is that translating into cooperation to get the Taliban into the peace process?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, with regard to the peace process, I think it is safe to say that Pakistan made serious efforts to try to bring the Taliban to the table. I mean, we know that through a variety of means.

But at the end of the day, the Taliban did not take up the offer to come to the table. And I think that is unfortunate and regrettable.

We continue to urge Pakistan to take robust action against the Haqqani and against the Taliban. And I think there are indications

that they have taken some actions, but I do not think it would be fair to say that those actions have been definitive.

Senator CARDIN. Well, obviously, this conversation has been going on for a long time, and it just looks like, when we put a major spotlight on them, we get some help. And then at times, we are either—there are strategic reasons or political reasons Pakistan seems to go in the wrong direction.

So it is a matter that not only has a direct impact on Pakistan, and truly it does, but also, of course, on their neighbors.

Let me just ask one additional question on human rights. There are many human rights activists in Afghanistan that think that the United States has not been strong enough with the human rights monitoring in Afghanistan.

I would just make that observation again as I did with corruption where we had a good discussion here today. It is critically important that the United States prioritize the human rights progress at every opportunity we can, that we are a major player in Afghanistan and that we must have accountability if we are going to be able to continue this to, we hope, a successful conclusion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Did either one of you, since you may not have the microphone in one of these hearings again, is there anything that you would like to say before we adjourn?

Mr. SAMPLER. Senator, it has just been an honor. I have appeared several times, and each time, I am continually impressed with the value of our government and how we do things. And it really does encourage me to watch other governments where I get the opportunity to work. They look up to us.

And so I very much appreciate the hearing today and the other opportunities you have given me to testify.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes?

Ambassador OLSON. Can I come back, Chairman?

I did want to make one additional point to Mr. Cardin's point.

I think that there has been a subtle shift in the way Pakistan is approaching the question of the Haqqanis and the Taliban in their conversations with us. I have had many, many conversations. I was formerly Ambassador to Pakistan, and I probably met with General Raheel 50 times to discuss this particular issue.

But I think that what has happened is that there is less of an emphasis on the strategic dimension that you alluded to, and I think there is a greater concern about taking on another fight when they already have a domestic terrorism issue that they are grappling with.

So to some extent, I think this is a question of capacity for the Pakistanis to deal with, not 100 percent. I mean, I would not suggest that there are not some people who do favor the Taliban for strategic reasons. But I think it is in many ways, from the perspective of the military establishment, simply having too many things they have to deal with at once.

And I think that we have the sense that we are making progress, slow, baby step progress, in all of these areas.

But again, let me join with my colleague, Larry, in thanking you for giving us the opportunity to be here today and to thank you for your support and cooperation.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

If I could follow up on that, you and I have had conversations about the Haqqani network. And we know that at roadblocks, they give them get-out-of-jail-free cards. They provide health care. I mean, the relationship is very cozy, and we understand. We know that the leadership of Pakistan knows, generally speaking, where they reside. They have moved in, in some cases, to suburban areas of Pakistan out of the fighter areas.

So I mean it is a problem that we all understand.

And we held subsidies, if you will, on buying fighter jets, to Pakistan. We see the clips each day and know that that has been widely reported both in Pakistan and India.

But in all candor, I mean, you disagree with that effort, I know, and I appreciate that, although I have not heard much from the State Department since.

What kind of effect does that have internally on Pakistan's calculations when they see that support is diminishing because of their lack of action?

Ambassador OLSON. Well, I think that there is a great deal of concern about what they see as a downward slope in the relationship with the United States. I think that one of the challenges here is, very candidly, Senator, that Pakistan is a very compartmentalized society and has a very compartmentalized government.

I think that most Pakistanis genuinely believe that their country is a victim of terrorism and has been engaged in a longstanding battle with terrorism for which we are unappreciative. That is not entirely true, but it is the issue of those groups that threaten their neighbors, which, quite frankly, the best one can say is that they have not pursued them with the same degree of firmness that they have pursued those that threaten them domestically. And one could give a more negative interpretation, as you say.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, look, I would say, on the compartmentalization, the big compartment is the military and the intelligence service, and the small compartment is the civilian leadership.

I would make another observation that when I first got here a decade ago, 9 and a half years ago, our relationship with Pakistan was very transactional. And we tried to move through a period of time where it was more whole and Kerry-Lugar was put in place. And I think we have reverted back over time because of disappointments to a very transactional relationship.

And I think it is unhealthy at present. And it seems to me that Pakistan has figured out a way to use their potential bad behavior as a way to get more U.S. resources. Our concerns about nuclear weapons on mobile launchers, our concerns about just what they are doing, in some ways has driven us to want to be more involved.

And I look forward to debriefing you as time goes on, but I do think we need to be thinking about these things in a much different way.

We thank you both for your service, and even though you will be gone from government today, hopefully Bill will answer the QFRs

that will come through Monday afternoon. That will be his first test. We welcome him.

We thank you. I do hope you will write a book. I mean that sincerely. I really do hope you will write a book that will help us think about this.

And, Ambassador Olson, again, thank you for many, many years of distinguished service. I look forward to seeing you again.

The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:44 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED TO AMBASSADOR  
RICHARD OLSON BY SENATOR CARDIN

*Question 1.* Human Rights: Afghanistan continues to struggle in the area of human rights, especially women's rights. Discrimination, physical abuse, and repression are widespread. Despite progress in areas like school attendance, representation in government, and access to healthcare, women's basic rights remain inadequately safeguarded.

- Some on the Afghan Human Rights Commission have criticized the U.S. for not prioritizing these issues with the Afghan government. Is this a fair assessment? What have you done to specifically advance human rights with Afghan government or security authorities? Are you pushing the Afghan government to adopt the optional protocol on the Convention Against Torture?
- What is the United States doing to curb abuses of women, girls, and young boys in Afghanistan, including by members of the ANDSF?
- Given reports of child abuse by the ANDSF, have human rights restrictions on security assistance such as the Child Soldiers Prevention Act or Leahy vetting been triggered?

Answer. A stable, secure, peaceful, and rights respecting Afghanistan has been and will continue to be a top priority for the Administration. Let there be no doubt that even though the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan has ended, we remain committed to supporting the rights of the Afghan people, particularly women and children, to fully participate in Afghan society. This commitment was reinforced in March 2015 when Secretary Kerry announced a new \$800 million development partnership. This initiative will promote stability and accountability by linking funds to specific reforms that promote and protect human rights, including strengthening rule of law and enhancing women's rights. Additionally, we are proud of the human rights gains we have helped Afghanistan make over the last 15 years. In 2001, life expectancy for women in Afghanistan was just 44 years of age. Now it is 62 years. Back then, almost no girls went to school. Today, 3 million attend. Women today hold office at almost all levels of the Afghan government, including three women ambassadors, 16 women judges, and seven women prosecutors in the Attorney General's Office. However, we recognize there is still more to do to solidify and advance these gains.

We very strongly voice support for the Afghan constitution, its protections of women and children, and for Afghanistan's meeting its international commitments that bar torture, abuse, and any other cruel treatment. Our strategy for Afghanistan focuses on building a professional security force that respects human rights. We pursue our strategy on several fronts, including pressing the Afghan government to provide training on human rights to its security forces, and funding programs to raise awareness of human rights among security force personnel, vulnerable populations, and victims of abuse. As a result of our engagement, President Ghani has made training about security force obligations to protect and promote human rights and international human rights laws a key component of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) training. We have called on the Afghan government to revise its criminal code to criminalize the sexual exploitation of children, and to further strengthen accountability mechanisms to address crimes committed against children by the security forces.

Regarding funding, we support programs that promote respect for women in the ANDSF, and support survivors of gender-based violence through recovery and re-

integration. In FY 2015, we funded 14 women's shelters in 12 provinces, half of the country's estimated 28. We also funded 11 of Afghanistan's 17 family guidance centers to provide legal, mediation, and counseling services to survivors of gender-based violence, and those at risk of experiencing it. All together these programs benefited over 3,000 women and children. Moreover, since 2011, we have worked with the Attorney General's Office to establish, train, and mentor specialized Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) prosecution units and commissions throughout Afghanistan to prosecute cases of violence against women, particularly those brought under Afghanistan's EVAW Law. In FY 2015, we trained and mentored staff from 20 provincial EVAW prosecution units and commissions. Additionally, our programming includes outreach to vulnerable male children and to communities to raise awareness of the mental health impacts of child abuse. Our programming also facilitates victims' access to psychosocial support centers and legal aid. We will continue working closely with the Afghan government and with Afghan communities to stop the abuse of women and children, especially by security forces.

We take very seriously reports of human rights abuses, particularly those against the most vulnerable, women and children. Unfortunately, we have seen reports indicating that abuses were committed by security force personnel. Those reports did not trigger restrictions on assistance under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act. Some ANSDF units have been barred under the Leahy Law, restricting their access to assistance. Because of our implementation of the Leahy Law, we have seen changes in behavior. In 2015, Afghanistan successfully remediated two units that had been excluded from receiving assistance under the Leahy law, putting them well ahead of other countries' remediation efforts. We have also seen more self-reporting by ANSDF officials, signaling that they are also taking human rights abuses seriously. The Afghan government has also taken steps to protect children, including criminalizing the recruitment of children in its security forces and establishing 13 Child Protection Units around the country. We will continue to work with the Afghan government to reduce security force abuses and end the use of children in the security forces.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO AMBASSADOR RICHARD OLSON BY SENATOR RUBIO

*Question 1.* In May 2014 President Obama identified two narrow missions in Afghanistan after 2014: training Afghan forces and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda. It seems that both of these missions have suffered significant setbacks. President Obama reluctantly agreed to keep 8,400 American troops in Afghanistan, but given the recent increase in violence in Afghanistan why do we continue to play this numbers game rather than basing our military posture on the conditions on the ground and achievement of our goals?

Answer. Afghan security forces assumed full responsibility for Afghanistan's security in January, 2015, as the United States and our NATO Allies and partners transitioned to the non-combat Train, Advise, and Assist Resolute Support Mission under NATO. 2016 is only the second year in which the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANSDF) have had full responsibility for security operations, and they face a tough and determined enemy.

U.S. and NATO capacity-building is a long process. The President, after extensive and deliberate consultations with his senior security advisors and military leadership, made a decision to maintain 8,400 troops in Afghanistan, the majority focused on developing the capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces. His decision reflects our continued strong commitment to the development of the Afghan state and its security institutions.

Our transition away from an operational role has enabled us, together with our NATO Allies and partners, to pivot to strengthening Afghan institutional capabilities, leaving the responsibility for combat operations to the Afghans. We are focused on strengthening the security institutions, and assisting Afghans in the development of financial, logistical, managerial systems, leadership and other areas needed to build sustained capacity.

The ANSDF have an authorized force level of 352,000 police, soldiers, and airmen. These forces have responsibility for combat operations, with Afghan Special Forces showing that they are capable of planning and carrying out over 80 percent of offensive operations.

Afghan forces, with international enabler support, have successfully defended the country's major population centers and have quickly regained critical checkpoints

and terrain. Today's ANDSF look nothing like the patchwork of ill-equipped and poorly trained militias that numbered some 30,000 a decade ago.

*Question 2.* Was it a mistake for the President to lay out a timetable years in advance for our military deployments that allowed the enemy in Afghanistan to plan against our decreasing troop commitment?

Answer. On June 22, 2011, President Obama announced 10,000 troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of 2011 and an additional 23,000 troops would leave the country by the summer of 2012. He made it clear the drawdown would continue until the NATO Mission completely handed over security to the Afghan authorities by the end of 2014.

This plan has had results. On January 1, 2015, Afghan security forces assumed full responsibility for the nation's security. Afghanistan's National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are gaining experience and confidence, and they are demonstrating that they are capable of defending their country.

However, Afghan forces still need our help. They are still developing and improving, and the United States and our NATO Allies and partners remain firmly committed to supporting this development through the non-combat role of Train, Advise and Assist (TAA).

At the NATO Summit this past July in Warsaw, NATO agreed to continue providing financial support to the Afghan forces through 2020 and agreed to continue the non-combat Resolute Support TAA Mission in 2017. This continued commitment to further support for the Afghan forces in the years to come makes clear that the United States and the international community continue to stand with Afghanistan.

*Question 3.* In July ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Kabul that killed at least 80 people gathered during a peaceful demonstration. Have we allowed ISIL to grow in Afghanistan and pose a threat to U.S. troops and the government in Afghanistan?

Answer. We take seriously the threat posed by ISIL, or Daesh, as does the Afghan government. We are working with our Afghan partners to counter Daesh in Afghanistan. According to assessments from the U.S. military and intelligence community, the United States and Afghan security forces have degraded the terrorist group, reducing the organization to less than half of its former estimated strength. Current intelligence estimates put the group's strength at 1,200 to 1,300 fighters, with remnants limited primarily to a narrow band in Nangarhar.

Daesh announced its affiliate in Afghanistan two years ago. Its adherents are primarily disaffected fighters from Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban. Many of the fighters who joined Daesh were disgruntled with the Taliban leadership. In most cases, these fighters switched allegiance due to promises of higher salaries, greater power, personal disputes, or a greater adherence to Daesh's ideology. Daesh's ideology has not gained wide acceptance in Afghanistan, and as the Counter-ISIL Coalition continues to make progress against ISIL's core leadership in Syria and Iraq, Daesh in Afghanistan becomes increasingly isolated from the revenue and resources that Daesh core tries to supply to its branches.

*Question 4.* The Taliban has claimed responsibility for bombings in June and July, including an attack on a convoy of newly graduated Afghan police officers. Significant portions of several provinces are now under control of the Taliban. Is Afghanistan descending further into chaos?

Answer. While Taliban attacks have captured headlines, the Afghan government remains in control of the majority of the country and all major population centers. Throughout this year, Afghan security forces have systematically executed a national military campaign strategy that has denied the Taliban a major strategic victory on the battlefield, repelling attempts to seize the provincial capitals of Helmand, Kunduz, and Uruzgan provinces. The Afghan government has had setbacks, as the Taliban have captured checkpoints and terrain, but the Afghan security forces have generally quickly recaptured those deemed most critical.

*Question 5.* Do we consider ISIL in Afghanistan and the Taliban enemies of the United States? Do our forces have the required authorities to target both groups?

Answer. ISIL, or Daesh, seeks the creation of a transnational caliphate and actively targets the United States' interests both abroad and at home. They are clearly enemies of the United States.

With the conclusion of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in December 2014, major U.S. combat operations against the Taliban came to an end. Since January 2015, as part of the non-combat NATO Resolute Support Mission, the United States, along with civilian and military personnel from 39 nations have been involved in a train, advise, and assist mission to continue the devel-

opment of Afghan security forces. In May, the President gave the Department of Defense additional authorities within its existing two missions. These new authorities permit U.S. combat enabler support to the ANDSF to achieve “strategic effects.” Our goal in Afghanistan remains support for the government of Afghanistan and support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process as the only way to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. Specifically in February, as part of our counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan, the President authorized the Department of Defense to use lethal force against Daesh’s organization in Afghanistan. In 2016, the ANDSF launched an operation called “Shafaq III,” focused on destroying Daesh strongholds in Nangarhar. After two months of Shafaq III operations, Daesh’s fighting forces were diminished and their logistics, training capabilities, and ability to find safe haven were degraded.

We would refer you to the Department of Defense for more specifics on these authorities.

*Question 6.* Press reports indicate that the Taliban are on the verge of having control over Helmand province. Do we expect the Taliban to hold this territory? Is the Afghan government able to counter these advances without U.S. support?

Answer. The Taliban are relatively well positioned in Helmand, given the province’s extremely rural and rugged terrain and the Taliban’s strong historic presence in the province. Nonetheless, despite the Taliban’s continued pressure on the ANDSF in Helmand, we do not expect the Taliban to seize the Helmand capital of Lashkar Gah. While the Taliban have contested terrain around Lashkar Gah, Afghan forces have mounted effective counterattacks, frequently re-taking lost terrain in hours or days, and employing air to ground strikes in support of ground operations.

In 2016, the United States increased the number of U.S. military advisors in Helmand to accelerate the reconstitution and training of the Helmand-based 215th Army Corps.

*Question 7.* The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction released a report yesterday noting that corruption leads to grievances against the Afghan government and channels support to the insurgency. The report also noted that “the failure to effectively address the problem means U.S. reconstruction programs, at best, will continue to be subverted by systemic corruption and, at worst, will fail.” What are we doing to ensure that the Afghan government is making progress in fighting corruption?

Answer. We take corruption seriously, as does the Afghan government. The Department of State routinely reinforces with Afghan officials the importance of taking steps to prevent corruption in Afghanistan. We make clear that corruption threatens international support for Afghanistan and undermines the country’s further development.

The majority of U.S. assistance goes to the security sector, and the Department of Defense works closely with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to eliminate and prevent corruption. Assistance to the Ministries of Defense and Interior is “conditioned” through commitment letters that these ministries sign with the Commanding General of Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A). These commitment letters include specific actions to combat corruption. Failure to fulfill the terms of commitment letters carries real consequences. For example, on a number of occasions, CSTC-A has frozen the delivery of assistance or supplies, such as fuel, to the ministries if there is credible evidence that they are not effectively implementing specific anti-corruption measures.

The State Department and USAID also have several programs in place to support and further the Afghan government’s efforts to tackle corruption and strengthen the rule of law. The Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement supports institutional reform in the Attorney General’s Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Court, and Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Support focuses on improving processes for hiring, budgeting, and procurement to minimize opportunities for corruption.

We have trained over 5,000 Afghan judges, attorneys, and investigators to build their knowledge of procedures and laws. Additionally, nearly 3,000 law students have used our supplemental course materials, attended our lecture and research/writing workshops, and gained practical experience in our national network of legal aid clinics.

USAID’s Advancing Efforts for Reform and Civic Accountability (AERCA) project supports the Afghan government’s commitment to preventing corruption by strengthening the ability of Afghan civil society organizations to oversee and support government officials in implementing reforms that will help combat and curb

corruption. This project also focuses on curbing lower level corruption, specifically bribery, by streamlining and reforming business practices in many of the Afghan government offices that engage directly with the public. For example, one key goal of the AERCA project is to support the Afghan government in its reform of national identification cards, drivers' licenses and small business licenses, public services which are vulnerable to corruption.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO DONALD L. SAMPLER, JR. BY SENATOR CARDIN

*Question 1.* I am concerned that democracy and governance funding appears to have fallen in Afghanistan. Given the current political problems between the President and CEO, it seems like D&G support would be necessary. Please describe USAID's commitment to democracy programming in Afghanistan and your plans for the future.

*Answer.* USAID supports Afghan-led development that builds government systems, improves public outreach, enhances financial management, and strengthens linkages and information exchange among central and sub-national levels of government. USAID programming targets Rule of Law, Good Governance, Civil Society/Media, and Political Competition and Consensus Building. Even in this increasingly strained budgetary environment, USAID remains committed to robust democracy programming.

Given considerable uncertainty surrounding the timing of future elections and the role political parties will play in Afghanistan's political processes, further USAID programming for political parties is on hold until electoral reforms that encourage the formation of political parties are enacted. Once there is more clarity on this subject, USAID may broaden its electoral reforms support to include open and effective election administration, as well as promoting broad public participation and civic awareness in the electoral process. Following the next elections, USAID will work with elected political entities to implement policies that are responsive to the broad public constituencies that supported their election to increase the public's confidence in the Afghan government and its ability to deliver.

Plans for USAID's Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) future efforts include media programs that will advance citizen engagement and encourage them to hold public institutions accountable. These programs will also promote active participation in economic, political, governance, and other processes with the aim of creating more peaceful, democratic, and inclusive communities, with a particular focus on increasing women's participation.

Another current method through which USAID furthers democracy and good governance in Afghanistan is by investing in the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), including the New Development Partnership (NDP) and the Second Public Financial Management Reform Project, which is focused on good governance. The ARTF is a multilateral, on-budget assistance fund that aims to provide fiscal stability to the Afghan government and incentivize it to provide essential services, build better governance, and enable citizen participation that will result in greater confidence in the democratically elected government.

*Question 2.* The New Development Partnership incentivizes funds based on actual Afghan government reforms. How would you assess the NDP to date? Is this a model which USAID is considering in other countries?

*Answer.* Through the NDP, USAID will make up to \$800 million available over four years to incentivize the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) to support the achievement of forty (40) targeted development results. Targeted areas for reform under the NDP include fiscal sustainability, governance / anti-corruption, and poverty reduction. The successful achievement of each development result, valued at \$20 million, allows the GOA to receive up to a \$200 million per year. In order for the NDP incentivized funding to be released, the U.S. government must first verify that an agreed result with an associated indicator has been achieved.

Overall, the GOA has made significant progress on achieving NDP reforms. In calendar year 2015, the GOA achieved 95% of planned results and \$180 million in NDP incentive funding was disbursed to the GOA. USAID recently completed verification of 2016 mid-year results and has determined that the GOA successfully achieved additional results for which it will receive \$100 million in NDP incentive funds. Significant progress has been made towards achieving the remaining results for 2016. These completed reforms include:

- Share of non-tax revenue in total domestic revenue increased from 16% in 2014 to 20% in 2015, which strengthens the Afghan government's ability to govern and deliver public services.
- Establishment of the National Procurement Committee which meets and reviews procurements regularly, which establishes a predictable, transparent process for how government ministries procure contracts.
- National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security approved by the President, which once approved by the Afghan Parliament, will commit the GOA to increasing women's participation in the peace process and the security sector and ensuring that women have access to protection and relief services.
- Tax Administration Law signed by the President and implementation started, which implements codified tax collection methods, rights, and obligations of taxpayers in order to ensure fiscal sustainability.
- Accuracy and efficiency of customs processes improved through the implementation of an automated valuation module in an effort to reduce the opportunity of corrupt behavior.

We have evidence that the NDP is helping the government prioritize and achieve results. For example, in December 2015 USAID informed the government that it had not achieved a civil service reform indicator under the NDP. Shortly thereafter the GOA took urgent action to complete the necessary steps to fulfill the NDP indicator.

The Afghanistan government is making vigorous efforts to accomplish the reforms included in the NDP. The Afghan Minister of Finance recently noted during a ceremony at the Presidential Palace, "NDP is an effective mechanism that aligns US assistance with the GOA's reform agenda. As an on-budget funding modality, it has given the GOA the required fiscal space to implement its development priorities that will improve the lives of the Afghan people."

The Agency is considering the applicability of this model for other countries.

*Question 4. Monitoring and Evaluation:* The "tiered monitoring system" uses different sources of information to assess whether programs are actually being implemented in the absence of U.S. direct monitoring. I understand that it has been on-line for months now.

- How would you assess the success of the tiered monitoring program to date?
- How can the U.S. realistically implement aid programs in parts of the country where local Afghan staff are reluctant to go?

*Answer 4.* The multi-tiered monitoring (MTM) approach helps mitigate the challenges associated with providing oversight in a restrictive environment—particularly, the limitations that prevent U.S. government staff from directly observing the implementation of USAID projects in Afghanistan. The MTM approach allows project managers in Afghanistan to collect project monitoring data from an expanded set of sources on the progress, completion, and effectiveness of USAID projects in order to assess whether project objectives are being met and whether adjustments are required. USAID/Afghanistan launched the MTM approach in late 2013 and formal guidance was approved in March 2016 to standardize the implementation of the approach across all of USAID's projects in Afghanistan.

Some examples of improvements in project management and performance that have resulted from USAID staff drawing upon information from different monitoring "tiers" include:

- In the infrastructure sector, USAID committed to building a critical, 101-kilometer road from Gardez to Khost in Western Afghanistan to enable the transport of goods between Afghanistan and Pakistan. USAID originally contracted with an international firm to implement the project; however, after monitoring efforts revealed the contractor was struggling to build community support for the project, which was causing delays, USAID turned project implementation over to a local firm. As a result, the project proceeded much faster and was recently completed.
- In August 2013, USAID signed an implementation letter with the Ministry of Education to fund a community-based education program. The project was originally intended to be implemented "on-budget" directly through the Ministry of Education. However, careful monitoring of the Ministry of Education's performance revealed it was not achieving key performance targets at the beginning of implementation. Consequently, USAID did not disburse funds to the Ministry of Education and instead partnered with UNICEF to implement the program. UNICEF has since partnered with the Ministry of Education, as well as provin-

cial and district education offices, to improve community-based education in Afghanistan.

- Additionally, using independent contractors, USAID has conducted over 32,000 monitoring and verification events over the past six years in Afghanistan. The independent contractors are often local Afghans who can easily travel throughout the country to provide objective validation and quality assessments on USAID projects. The contractors use a variety of monitoring methods and tools, including photos, global positioning systems (GPS), site visits, and interviews, and they in turn provide information from their visits to USAID Contracting Officer's Representatives/Agreement Officer's Representatives for additional follow-up.

In 2013, USAID requested that the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audit USAID/Afghanistan's MTM approach to help identify potential monitoring gaps as early as possible and to make appropriate corrections. The report was issued in late 2015 and USAID has taken swift action to implement the recommendations in the audit. All recommendations of the OIG's audit were closed as of August 26, 2016.

USAID closely monitors the operational environment in which it implements projects, including through monthly operational environment reports that track changes in accessibility in different parts of the country. These reports show any disruptions or delays in USAID projects in the previous month that have resulted from changes in the operating environment, and thus allow USAID to assess whether changes in implementation are needed. To implement projects, USAID relies heavily on its implementing partners, which in many cases employ Afghan staff who are from areas where the projects are taking place due to their familiarity and ability to operate in the area. In cases in which there are security concerns that severely limit the mobility of our Afghan implementing partner staff, USAID pursues actions such as adjusting our implementation approach or temporarily or permanently suspending projects in that area.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO DONALD L. SAMPLER, JR. BY SENATOR RUBIO

*Question 1.* What options are available for Afghanistan to compensate for the decrease in donor aid since the late 2014 security transition? How has the slowing of economic growth affected attitudes of the population and support for the government, if at all?

*Answer.* As international financial support for Afghanistan declines, donors and the Afghan government are working together to concentrate resources on the building blocks of sustainable development in order to maintain development progress. This includes an emphasis on activities that: 1) facilitate private sector-led economic growth; 2) investment in human capital to build a healthy educated future workforce; and 3) incentivize key Afghan reforms so that the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) can be more accountable to its citizens.

The New Development Partnership (NDP) is a strong example of incentivizing the GOA. Announced by President Obama in March 2015 during the visit of President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah to Washington, D.C., the NDP offers assistance to the Afghan government based upon the fulfillment of approximately 40 total reforms in the areas of fiscal sustainability, governance, and poverty reduction. The reforms are jointly agreed upon by USAID and Afghanistan's Ministry of Finance. Once a reform is achieved, a set amount of USAID funding is committed to support the Government of Afghanistan's budget priorities. In order for funding to be released, the U.S. Government must first verify that a reform has been achieved.

Overall, the GOA has made steady progress on NDP reforms. As of September 2016, the Afghan government had accomplished 16 out of 20 reforms that were expected to be achieved by the end of calendar year 2016. It is important to note that the achievement of only ten reform indicators has been publicly announced; the achievement of six additional reform indicators will be announced publicly in the coming days.

A few examples include:

- Establishment of GOA's National Procurement Committee which meets and reviews procurements regularly, which establishes a predictable, transparent process for how government ministries procure contracts.

- National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security approved by the President, which—once approved by the Afghan Parliament—will commit the GOA to increasing women’s participation in the peace process and the security sector and ensuring that women have access to protection and relief services.
- Customs Department rolled out a national e-payment system, which enhances the GOA’s ability to collect revenue on imports and reduces opportunities for “skimming” and corruption.

The U.S. Government recognizes that the Afghan economy plays a critical role in public confidence, both between Afghans and their elected government, and in how Afghans view their future prosperity. In particular, creating viable, sustainable employment opportunities is essential to providing young Afghans with a reason to stay in their homeland rather than emigrate. Working closely with other donors, USAID supports the GOA in its efforts to create jobs and increase economic growth in the country. USAID’s Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (AWDP) complements the development goals of the Afghan government by strengthening the labor pool in major economic areas of the country, seeking to address the challenges of high unemployment and the scarcity of technically-skilled Afghan labor and trained business managers. AWDP has provided 30,902 mid-career/semi-professional employees and job seekers—36 percent of whom were women—with technical and business management skills. USAID also supports the GOA’s Jobs for Peace program, which provides small grants to rural communities to fund local public works projects.

Even with the right plan, a better security environment, and progress on the reform agenda, the consensus among donors is that Afghanistan will require international assistance for the foreseeable future. As a result, we remain committed to our Afghan partners and ensuring a stable international coalition of support for Afghanistan. The Department of State and USAID worked with the Afghan government and the European Union to plan the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. The European Union co-hosting the Brussels conference with the GOA and anticipates most major donors will commit to providing assistance “at or near current levels,” through 2020.

Recognizing that assistance budgets will decline, USAID is working closely with our partners to ensure the GOA and civil society have the necessary support and capacity to increasingly manage and monitor their own projects in Afghanistan. USAID programs are designed in collaboration with the GOA and are targeted to key areas where our Afghan partners are seeking assistance. Annually, USAID undertakes a portfolio review with the GOA to ensure programmatic alignment and the continued improvement in capacity of the GOA assume responsibility to provide services to its citizens. In 2015, Afghanistan’s budgetary revenue rose by nearly 22 percent over the previous year, a positive sign that the GOA is increasingly able to fund the services it provides.

*Question.* What is the status of U.S. efforts to establish a “New Silk Road” trade and transit hub that might help Afghanistan’s economy? What have been the key accomplishments of that effort to date?

*Answer.* USAID works in close coordination with the Department of State to further the goals of the New Silk Road vision to strengthen connectivity between Afghanistan and its neighbors in Central and South Asia, bolstering Afghanistan’s economic growth and stability. Efforts are focused in the following areas:

*Trade:* U.S. Government (USG) support has recently helped Afghanistan’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and has also assisted other countries in the region, such as Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, to implement important WTO commitments. In September 2016, USAID sponsored the 6th annual Central Asia Trade Forum (CATF), bringing together approximately 500 entrepreneurs, traders, businessman, policymakers, diplomats, and journalists from across Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to identify trade opportunities. The CATF has firmly established itself as a powerful convening forum for traders in the region, with more than \$9 million in new business deals agreed to at the CATF this year. Additionally, USAID built a critical, 101-kilometer road from Gardez to Khost in Western Afghanistan to enable the transport of goods between Afghanistan and Pakistan. These are tangible demonstrations of the impact that USG assistance is having in this important area.

*Energy:* Working closely with other donors, the USG provides important financial and technical support for the Central and South Asia CASA-1000 project, a 1225 kilometer transmission line system that will allow Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic to sell 1300 megawatts of clean, surplus hydropower to Afghanistan and Pakistan. CASA-1000 will improve cooperation on energy trade across Central and

South Asia, providing upstream revenue to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, generating transit fees and electricity for Afghanistan, and delivering much-needed electricity to Pakistan. CASA also forms part of efforts to expand the regional market for power across Central and South Asia. The USG strongly supports this objective. A bigger, more robust regional energy market will allow exporting countries and transit countries, e.g. Afghanistan, to increase their domestic revenue base and become less reliant on external donors' support. The USG has committed \$15 million to CASA and this supports construction, technical project support and work of the CASA secretariat. This assistance has helped to leverage significant multilateral contributions to CASA. Technical assistance provided by USG is currently ensuring that the project benefits from specialist inputs on major procurements.

The USG is also working with Asian Development Bank, through technical coordination and through financial support via the Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund, on implementation of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) energy transmission inter-connection program. Our support for TUTAP is helping to connect more Afghans to safe and reliable supplies of power and is an essential part of growing the market for power across the region.

Finally, USAID, in partnership with Afghanistan's Ministry of Energy and Water, organized a two-day Energy Business Opportunities Conference in Dubai, on September 18–19, 2016. More than 200 participants representing Middle Eastern, Central Asian, Turkish, European, and North American companies working in the energy sector attended the event, in addition to Afghan and international financial institutions and officials from various Afghan Ministries, the United Arab Emirates, and the USG.

*Nutrition:* Working with Kazakh millers, exporters, and specialist NGOs, USAID has fortified wheat exports and cooking oils exported from Kazakhstan to customers in Afghanistan and Pakistan. USAID is also currently in the process of determining a U.S. university that will research wheat productivity and nutrition.

*Water:* Several countries in Central Asia are among the most inefficient water users in the world. A lack of transboundary water agreements across the region leads to high levels of uncertainty about water availability. In turn, this leads to high levels of consumption and inefficient patterns of water use. Central and South Asia are forecast to be negatively affected by climate change, with water shortages expected to be a particular threat to the economies of the region, not just because of the impact on agriculture and food security, but because of the important role hydropower plays in energy production. Effective transboundary water resource allocation is especially important. USAID is working with other donors and host-country partners in the water sector to support programs that are building a cadre of experts who can better manage water resources across the region. Building these skills is an important element in promoting cooperation on more efficient transboundary water use across Central and South Asia.

Representatives from Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Energy & Water, and Ministry of Finance visited eight U.S. cities from September 12–30 to learn about water resource management in rural and urban areas, the use of water resources and water sharing agreements between different actors, cross-border water challenges and conflict resolution strategies, and challenges to the equitable use and allocation of water resources.

Additionally, The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) hosted a workshop in Almaty September 12–13 on Transboundary Water Resources in the Region of Central Asia: The State of Play. The workshop included Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries, except Uzbekistan. Supported by the USG, the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and UNESCO hosted a meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, 8–9 November 2016. The seminar was called to discuss the impact of glaciers melting on water resources in Central Asia in the context of climate change.

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