

Testimony by Mark L. Schneider, Senior Vice President, International Crisis Group to the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives “Training and Equipping Afghan Security Forces: Unaccounted Weapons and Strategic Challenges.”

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I want to thank the Chairman Congressman John Tierney and the Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to offer testimony today to the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs on the topic of “Training and Equipping Afghan Security Forces: Unaccounted Weapons and Strategic Challenges.” On behalf of the International Crisis Group, I also want to express our appreciation for the Subcommittee’s continued exploration of key issues that relate to success or failure in combating al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

If I might, Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin with the final phrase in the title of today’s hearing: strategic challenges. Strategic challenges face the international community in building competent and effective security forces and also in stemming the increase in the capacity of the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies to threaten the lives of the Afghan people, the security of the Afghan state, and thus once more pose a threaten to the U.S. and the West generally.

Strategic incoherence and inadequate coordination here in Washington and in Kabul within the U.S. military, between the military and civilian government agencies and between the U.S. and its international partners in Kabul are fatal to success in confronting the Taliban insurgency. The results of that strategic chaos have played out all across Afghanistan over the past seven years.

The UN Security Council reported in November 2008, 6,792 security incidents through the first ten months last year, compared to 508 in 2003. The UN also reported last September that some 13 districts were under the control of the Taliban, another 90 at extreme risk—meaning that neither the government, the UN and the international donor community nor NGOs—can carry out development projects in those districts on an on-going basis. That also does not include another 50 or so high risk districts where access is intermittent.

We also have heard nearly every military commander, from General McKiernan, General Mullen, and Secretary Gates point pessimistically to the trend lines moving in the wrong direction unless there are fundamental changes in policy. According to CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus, Afghanistan "has deteriorated markedly in the past

two years," a result of worsening security, escalating corruption and high levels of opium trafficking.

That is why we are hopeful that the three reviews being prepared by General Lute at the NSC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Petraeus will be followed, presumably with the direct leadership of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, by a synthesis into a single set of recommendations for the President. Hopefully it will result in what General Fields' January 30, 2009 SIGAR report to the Congress describes as an "overarching, unified strategy" for Afghanistan. The strategy must be integrated and encompass security, governance and reconstruction in Afghanistan—with transparent benchmarks—and ultimately all parties, including the Afghan government, must be held accountable.

The International Crisis Group has been recognized as the independent, non-partisan, non-governmental source of field-based analysis, policy advice and advocacy to governments, the United Nations, and other multilateral organizations on the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict. Crisis Group publishes annually around 90 reports and briefing papers, covering 60 countries as well as the monthly [CrisisWatch](#) bulletin. Our staff is located on the ground in twelve regional offices and seventeen other locations in or near crisis zones around the world, with four advocacy offices, in Brussels (the global headquarters), Washington, London and New York; and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. Our South Asia regional office is in Islamabad and we have had an office in Kabul since shortly after the Taliban was removed in 2001.

I have attached a one-page annex which describes briefly a series of Crisis Group reports over recent years on Afghanistan which we believe point to ways forward in many areas critical to reversing the current downward spiral of insecurity and violence.

Let me discuss our findings with respect to building a national police force able to uphold the rule of law. Our first report examining this issue came in August 2007 where we found almost total collapse. The GAO conducted an excellent study last year, which noted that despite the appropriations of \$6.2 billion none of the 433 police units were fully capable of stand-alone performance.

This past December 2008, we published our follow-on report. While we note a welcome increase in financial resource commitments of \$3.8 b. for 2007 and 2008 (and another \$1 b. for FY2009) a significant portion has yet to be disbursed. Again the recent naming of a new interior minister and a new attorney general are welcome developments along with the arrival of a new EU police commander. An innovative Focused District Development program designed to train, mentor and deploy district-by-district law enforcement units has been started. However:

- the U.S. commander states that he lacks at least 2300 trainers and mentors; (Even if he received those trainers, the estimate was the re-training process would not be completed for at least five years. After one year it has reached 50 of 350 districts.) It is hard to understand why with 675,000 police officers in the U.S. and an

- estimated 10-20% in the military reserve or national guard that we cannot find a way to get the necessary police trainers into the field—perhaps by shifting their reserve specialties from infantrymen or cooks to police trainers.
- the training periods are extremely short –for comparison purposes consider that we require 28 weeks to train a Haitian policeman and just eight in Afghanistan;
 - despite its nominal lead, the EU as well has failed to provide needed personnel or resources; and
 - the inability to avoid corrupt interference in police appointments and in operations undermines morale. (On any give day, about 20% of the supposed 80,000 police officers were absent from duty—another 17% are listed on the rolls but they actually are the names of dead or wounded police, but remain there so their families will receive a paycheck.)

Perhaps as disturbing as the lack of financial and human resources has been the lack of an understanding of the basic function of civilian police; police officers are not warfighters. Their role is to uphold the law and fight crime and not to fight wars. Putting police in the front lines against the Taliban has resulted in three times more police than army troops killed last year, hurting morale and depressing recruitment.

The basic requirements for reversing these conditions begin with:

- ensuring that police reform occurs within larger state-building efforts;
- clearly defining and respecting the roles and responsibilities of the police, military and intelligence agencies;
- ensuring that the International Policing Coordination Board, chaired by the Minister of Interior and with UNAMA, ISAF, NATO, the U.S. Embassy, CSTC-A, EUSR and the EC, actually is permitted to coordinate policy decisions.
- parallel reform and links with prosecutors offices and the justice sector (I cannot emphasize how important it is to ensure at least some progress can be seen in the broader criminal justice system so that if the police force arrests drug traffickers, they are tried and, if found guilty, go to jail for a long, long time;
- engaging civil society, particularly women’s organizations, and promoting some linkages to civilian accountability mechanisms; and
- focus on the community policing requirements to build trust and credibility, perhaps by linking the returned, trained police forces to the teams.

Building competent and effective police forces should be of equal concern to the goal of building an Afghan National Army, and in terms of the daily lives of Afghan families, perhaps even more important. I would hope that the end of the current review of U.S. strategy for Afghanistan will raise the priority attached to establishing an effective Afghan National Police force within a functioning rule of law.