

**U.S. POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN AND
THE REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF
THE JUNE 2014 TRANSITION**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

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CONTENTS

	Page
Corker, Hon. Bob, U.S. Senator from Tennessee, opening statement	2
Dobbins, Hon. James, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC	3
Prepared statement	6
Response to question submitted for the record by Senator Robert Menen- dez	39
Responses to questions submitted for the record by Senator Marco Rubio .	41
Magsamen, Kelly E., Acting Assistant Secretary, Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, Department of Defense, Washington, DC	10
Prepared statement	12
Responses to questions submitted for the record by Senator Robert Menendez	39
Menendez, Hon. Robert, U.S. Senator from New Jersey, opening statement	1

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2014

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:20 p.m. in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez, Cardin, Shaheen, Murphy, Kaine, Corker, Risch, Rubio, and McCain.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. Good afternoon. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Let me thank both of our witnesses for joining us today as we consider U.S. policy in Afghanistan and the regional implications of the drawdown of international forces.

The hearing comes at a critical time. The President has announced his drawdown plan. The Bergdahl transfer took place, and a second round of Presidential elections was held on Saturday. The images of Afghans, especially women, lining up to vote were inspiring and a testament to the broad commitment to the democratic process. But no matter who ultimately wins, the incoming government will face significant challenges, some of crisis proportions.

First, I have real concerns about the viability of the Afghan economy, which has already begun to contract with the drawdown of international forces. According to SIGAR, U.S. assistance over the past 7 years was equivalent to about 75 percent of the country's GDP. I understand that Afghanistan will require assistance both off and on budget for quite some time, but what I have never seen is a credible and comprehensive plan for real sustainability in Afghanistan that incorporates past projects and future work. To continue to support robust assistance, I will need to see a serious examination of project sustainability.

Second and above all, the new government will face an ongoing security challenge. The Afghan National Security Forces performed well during the last fighting season and protected voters during these two rounds of elections. But as we look forward, those forces still do not have the logistical capabilities nor close air support that will be required in an ongoing fight against the insurgency.

And finally, this hearing will also explore the regional implications of the drawdown. Pakistan announced a full-scale operation into North Waziristan over the weekend, a long overdue move in my view, which indicates that their government is taking the threat from cross-border terrorist groups more seriously. We have heard that our friends in India and the governments of Central Asia are concerned about what the drawdown will mean for regional stability in the years ahead.

So today, I hope that we will hear the administration's vision for security in the region and how U.S. interests will be protected in this dynamic and volatile part of the world. Will the threat posed by terrorist groups in the region change following the drawdown of U.S. troops? How will our security cooperation with countries in the region evolve?

It must be said Afghanistan is not Iraq, but it is hard not to draw comparisons to today's security situation in Iraq and what we could see in the coming years as we wind down our presence in Afghanistan. At the end of the day, we have to guard against letting history repeat itself because of decisions we make and actions that we fail to take. Today, I hope our panelists can help clearly lay out the choices that are before us.

Frankly, last month when the administration announced plans to completely draw down forces from Afghanistan by 2016, I was concerned about the plan and I still have concerns. We have made hard-fought but fragile gains in Afghanistan that need to be protected through continued support of the ANSF and the Afghan Government.

And finally, alongside our regional security efforts, the administration has embarked on a new Silk Road initiative which seeks to strengthen Afghanistan's economic ties in the region. In my view, this could be a boon for Afghanistan's economy, but I am concerned that long-standing barriers to regional cooperation may prove too great to overcome.

So I look forward to hearing in detail from Ambassador Dobbins how this vision is being translated into reality and what challenges lie ahead. Before I introduce both of our witnesses, let me recognize Senator Corker for his opening remarks.

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

Senator CORKER. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for having this hearing.

And to the two of you, thank you for coming here and helping us understand what is developing in the region.

As was said, an election process is underway. Hopefully, it is going to be one that the people of Afghanistan consider is valid. It looks like that may well be the case, as has been the norm. Obviously, claims of fraudulent activity are taking place, and whether that is just someone who is behind in a race trying to put themselves in a better position or whether that is actually occurring, we will see. But it appears that the election process has gone by in a way that hopefully will have some degree of credibility and we can move on.

As the chairman mentioned, the President's announcement regarding having 9,800 troops after this year in Afghanistan—candidly the first part of that for me was one that is welcomed. I was very concerned that there were people at the White House pushing for a zero number, and I know they were pushing. Fortunately, they were not successful. I think all of us know—who have talked with General Dunford—the only way for us to have a multiplier effect around the country where we are enabling the five areas of the country outside of Kabul to actually continue to put forth security is for us to have that number of troops. On the front end, I will say General Dunford was pushing for 10,000 troops. The President has agreed to 9,800 troops. That is a good thing.

The second part of the announcement, though, where artificially we are deciding that you are going to step down over the next 2 years to zero is something that is unacceptable. I hope the President will revisit that. I hope he will take steps relative to what is happening on the ground. My sense is—and I hope this is the case—that that was simply a statement for domestic consumption, one we have seen a lot of out of this administration, to hopefully assuage people back home. But obviously, based on what we have seen in Iraq, making decisions about timelines that have nothing to do with what is happening on the ground have been very detrimental to the region. And as the chairman mentioned, there are a lot of concerns in the region about this statement, which again we hope is one that is only rhetorical, not based in reality. But with that, hopefully progress will be made, and hopefully, a decision about the number of troops that will actually remain there over time again will be based on what is happening on the ground.

I know the special envoy will have some statement to be made about the other issue relative to some of the switches that have occurred recently. I look forward to that. I appreciate his call, and I look forward to the testimony of both of you today.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Corker.

So we are pleased to have with us today Ambassador James Dobbins, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ambassador Dobbins is no stranger to the committee or to that part of the world. So we welcome you back, Ambassador, to the committee. And Kelly E. Magsamen, who is the Acting Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs of the Defense Department.

I will just start off by saying we will include your full statements in the record, without objection. I would ask you to try to summarize your statements in around 5 minutes or so so that we can enter into a dialogue with you. And, Ambassador, we will start with you.

STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES DOBBINS, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador DOBBINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Corker, members. I would like to start by thanking this committee for its continuous support for our country's efforts in Afghanistan. I personally much appreciate the counsel and support that we have gotten during my tenure.

I think both Senator Corker and Chairman Menendez have raised the issue of whether the President's announcement provides sufficient time for the Afghan Armed Forces to develop independent and sustainable capabilities and for the country to stabilize. And I think the answer is, it can provide enough time. Whether it does or not is going to depend on several factors. And I would like to go through what those factors are, which I think will answer a number of other questions or at least raise a number of other questions.

First of all, it does depend on whether the Afghan security forces take advantage of the remaining time, during which they will be getting American advice, training, and assistance through the presence of an American and NATO military presence. There I think that the prognosis is reasonably positive. There is little doubt that the Afghan security forces have improved measurably over the last 3 or 4 years and even over the last year. We have gone from having a presence in Afghanistan of NATO and American forces of over 150,000 to having less than 50,000 today, and during that period, Afghan security forces have not crumbled, have not weakened. They have, in fact, measurably improved by almost any metric, and I think that is a generally recognized fact, that there have been continuous improvements in their performance during this period of drawdown. And so I think there is a reasonable prospect that those improvements can continue and the remaining deficiencies, some of which the chairman mentioned, can be made up during this period of continued American military presence.

I would also note that the American military presence is not going to disappear in 2017. It will be incorporated in a significantly sized Office of Defense cooperation within the framework of the American Embassy rather than as an independent force. So that is one of the dependents.

I think it is also going to depend on whether the current Presidential elections produce a widely recognized outcome, one that is accepted by Afghans as a whole, one that is recognized by the international community, one that sustains a continued international support, financial support, as well as other forms of support.

So far, as you both noted, the election process has been notable for meeting its timetables, for being conducted in a reasonable secure environment given the conditions in the country, for the moderation and constructiveness of the campaign, and for the participation of voters.

I do think, however, that the most difficult time and the greatest challenges are probably still to come. You know, Afghanistan—as in other countries, there is not a large record of good losers. In situations at Afghanistan's level of development, there are levels of corruption. There are fraud. There are mechanisms to detect it, but the mechanisms themselves become controversial and challenged. It is going to be some time before we know the outcome of the vote. It is, therefore, critical that everyone, the candidates, their supporters, as well as the media and the voters, remain patient, not prejudge the outcome and allow the Afghan electoral institutions time to do their job effectively in accordance with Afghan law.

As happened in the first round of voting, Afghans who have specific concerns and complaints have the opportunity to bring them

to the independent electoral commission and the independent electoral complaints commission. These bodies understand that their transparency and their impartiality will be critical to ensuring the Afghan people broadly accept President Karzai's successor. As I said, we are already seeing heightened levels of controversy over the second round, and I anticipate we are going to go through a difficult few weeks before we have an outcome that is generally accepted and widely recognized as reflecting the will of the Afghan people.

A third factor that is going to be important is, as the chairman has noted, the regional behavior. Afghanistan is historically a weak state surrounded by more powerful states who have often acted in ways that tend to promote conflict in Afghanistan. This has not happened in recent years to the extent that it has historically. Indeed, there is an unusual conjunction of policies in the neighboring states. I think it was interesting and maybe remarkable that in the aftermath of President Karzai's announcement in December that he was not going to sign the bilateral security agreement, President Putin, President Xi, Prime Minister Singh, and Prime Minister Sharif each individually and privately urged him to sign the agreement. That is a pretty unusual conjunction of regional states that actually are advising him to support the continued presence of an American and NATO military presence, albeit for a limited period of time. But still, it does show that there is an anxiety about the transition, that there is an anxiety about the country's stability, that for the moment at least, all of these states are supporting the regime in Kabul, want to see it consolidated, want to see us help to continue to support that consolidation. We obviously need to maintain that coherence.

Among Afghanistan's neighbors, Pakistan probably has the greatest potential for influence over Afghanistan's future, for better or worse. In the past, Pakistan has projected influence in Afghanistan by its toleration of and even support for Afghan militants. The growth of an indigenous militant threat to Pakistan's own constitutional order in the form of the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP, and the many links between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, along with several other militant and terrorist groups active in Pakistan, have made this an increasingly costly and ultimately unsustainable strategy and one that I think most of the Pakistani leadership now recognize as wholly unsustainable.

After an extended effort to negotiate with the TTP, Prime Minister Sharif has ordered a major military offensive designed, we are told, to clear all militants, foreign and domestic, out of their major stronghold in North Waziristan. In the short term, this offensive will present challenges to Afghanistan as innocent civilian refugees, along with Afghan, Pakistani, and other foreign militants flee across the border. In the longer term, however, if the Pakistani authorities deliver on their promise to deny the use of their territory to all militant groups, foreign as well as domestic, this effort will significantly enhance security in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Finally, the last dependency I would like to mention is frankly the dependency for this timetable or any timetable with respect to Afghanistan on continued congressional support. In the current

fiscal year, Congress cut the foreign assistance budget to Afghanistan by something like 50 percent. Now, I think in the report that accompanied that, it was explained that this was caused both by a large buildup in the pipeline and frankly also by some provocative and unnecessarily provocative statements that President Karzai had made that rightly I think caused a great deal of anxiety and annoyance. I am hoping that both of these problems will be in the past. The pipeline has been reduced. President Karzai will soon be succeeded by a new leadership.

We agree that aid for Afghanistan, both civilian and military, particularly in the civilian area, needs to be gradually reduced over the next several years, but we would urge that this be a gradual process. There is already a number of important transitions that are underway in Afghanistan. I have talked about the electoral transition. We have talked about the military transition. We do not want to pile too many abrupt transitions on Afghanistan all at once. So I think the administration will go back to the more gradual reduction and historic aid levels, which I think were \$5 billion only a few years ago, and we hope that the Congress will support us in this regard.

Now, we have all read for years about——

The CHAIRMAN. Can I have you wrap up because we are at 10 minutes already?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Sure. I am done.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Dobbins follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. policy in Afghanistan and the region along with my colleague, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense Magsamen.

Allow me to begin by thanking the members of the committee for your continued support for our mission; I know that you also share my appreciation for the generosity and steadfast resolve of the American people in support of Afghanistan. I would particularly like to recognize the dedication and bravery of thousands of American men and women who have served in our armed forces, our diplomatic outposts, and our assistance programs in that country.

This mission began in 2001 to ensure that Afghanistan could never again be used by those who would plot against the United States or our allies. Since then, in concert with partners from more than 50 nations, we have advanced this goal. Working hand in hand with dedicated Afghans, we also transformed the lives of millions. All of us—Americans, Afghans, NATO allies, ISAF partners, and the many other countries that have joined this unprecedented international effort—share a vision of a sovereign, unified, democratic, and stable Afghanistan, a vision which is closer to realization today than at any time in that country's history.

For several years now, our efforts have increasingly focused on consolidating the gains made over the past 13 years, and on empowering Afghans and Afghan institutions to deliver security, the rule of law, and vital services, including health, education, and economic opportunity, that all Afghans deserve. That is why we launched a process of transition in 2010, by which the Afghan National Security Forces have increasingly taken the lead role in protecting the Afghan people from insurgents who would turn back the clock on the extraordinary changes in Afghanistan. When Afghan and NATO leaders announced in Lisbon in 2010 that, by the end of 2014, Afghans would have full responsibility for their own security, many said the timeline was unrealistic—that the ANSF was simply not up to the challenge. A year ago last June, however, we marked the “milestone” of transition to Afghan lead on all combat operations throughout the country. Since then, Afghan forces have won the trust of the Afghan citizens in their ability to protect them, a trust that was manifest in the high voter turnout during both rounds of the recent elections.

Last month, President Obama announced that, contingent on the conclusion of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), the United States is prepared to keep 9,800 troops beyond the end of this year to participate in a NATO train, advise, and assist mission, and to continue a limited counterterrorism mission. By the end of 2015, U.S. forces will shift to a Kabul-Bagram disposition. By 2017, the U.S. security mission in Afghanistan will transform to an embassy-based security assistance model with a significant military and defense component. The President also made clear that 2017 will not mark the end of our commitment to Afghanistan. Afghans will need the assistance and partnership of the international community for years to come to strengthen their institutions, economy, and government. With continued support from Congress and the American people, the commitments in the Strategic Partnership Agreement, at the NATO summit in Chicago, and at the Tokyo Conference will help ensure that Afghanistan continues on a path of self-reliance and democratic development.

The timetable President Obama has laid out for Afghan self-sufficiency is a demanding one, but no more demanding than the transition already accomplished. Since 2011, NATO forces in Afghanistan have dropped from over 140,000 to 48,000 today, without occasioning any substantial loss of ground or population to the Taliban.

Institutional capacity has also grown beyond the security sector, as evidenced by the recent Presidential and local elections, the first to be administered almost entirely by the Afghans, the first to have occurred on schedule, and the best organized to date.

In April, roughly 7 million Afghans voted in the first round of the Presidential election—significantly higher than the turnout of the 2009 vote. Last Saturday, the runoff pitted two strong candidates against each other. On both occasions, Afghan forces provided the security, Afghan electoral bodies planned and administered the voting, Afghan media provided platforms for reasoned discussion about policy, Afghan civil society organizations and candidate agents monitored the polling centers, and Afghan political elites formed multiethnic tickets and campaigned all across the country.

Equally notable was the quality of the campaign, which was spirited and widespread, while generally moderate in tone and national in character. The candidates crisscrossed the country, participated in large rallies, while generally eschewing negative campaigning and narrow ethnically based appeals.

The first round of Afghan Presidential elections in April and Saturday's runoff put the ANSF to the test. On both occasions the Taliban organized hundreds of attacks, but Afghans still lined up to vote. Last Saturday, NATO forces did not fire a single shot, leaving election day security entirely in Afghan hands. Considering how much the Taliban had focused on disrupting the Afghan elections, the ANSF's efforts to secure the election bode well for the ANSF's performance in the long run.

It will be some time before we know the outcome of the vote. It is therefore critical that everyone—the candidates and their supporters, as well as the media and the voters—remain patient, not prejudge the outcome and allow the Afghan electoral institutions time to do their jobs effectively and in accordance with Afghan law. As happened in the first round of voting, Afghans who have specific concerns and complaints have the opportunity to bring them to the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. Those bodies understand that their transparency and impartiality will be critical in ensuring that the Afghan people broadly accept President Karzai's successor as legitimate and credible. Premature or undocumented allegations of fraud are as dangerous as fraud itself.

The Afghan Government has tentatively scheduled the inauguration of the next President for August 2, and we look forward to working with whoever that will be. At the same time, we also recognize the need for national unity, and call on both candidates to work together after the election in the spirit of patriotism that has marked the campaign so far.

The next Afghan President faces many challenges and uncertainties. What is certain is the commitment of the United States to our partnership with Afghanistan. An important aspect of this is our commitment, which President Obama reiterated on May 28, to conclude the BSA with the next Afghan administration as quickly as possible. With both Presidential frontrunners having stated publicly that they would sign the BSA promptly upon taking office, the way forward on this now appears clear.

Let me also recognize the vast improvements in human rights that have been made since 2001—none more striking than the gains made by women. There are serious concerns that as our presence draws down, these rights will somehow be sacrificed. I am encouraged that both candidates made strengthening the rule of law,

the protection of human rights and improving governance central tenets of their campaign platforms. Independent institutions like the judiciary and the human rights commission have a critical role to play in ensuring that there is no backsliding on the gains that have been made, and it is important that the next President nominate and appoint strong, qualified, and reform-minded individuals to lead these bodies. The United States remains committed to supporting and bolstering the transparency of these institutions so that all Afghans have confidence that their rights will be protected. Crucial as well to promoting accountability and respect for human rights is an independent, vibrant civil society—which has blossomed remarkably in Afghanistan over the past decade, and must retain the operating space to do its vital work.

And in terms of governance, we all must remember that Parliamentary elections are less than a year away. Parliament has made important strides in adopting new laws, in vetting Presidential nominations and in serving as an oversight body to improve government accountability. Parliamentarians will need to continue performing these important functions, even as the campaign season for the legislative elections approaches. And the next President and the security institutions will need to work closely with the electoral bodies to ensure those elections are timely and successful.

Given the progress that has been made in the political transition thus far, we are also beginning to think about how best to help the new Afghan President to address the myriad challenges he will face. The new President will need to strengthen Afghan executive, legislative, and judicial institutions; address corruption, which is corrosive to the legitimacy of the Afghan state; pursue economic reforms that will enable private sector led growth and stabilize the fiscal environment; determine a path for launching a reconciliation process; and set a constructive course for improving relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors. In my experience, governments all around the world often have problems doing more than one or two things at a time—which makes the scope of the agenda faced by the Afghan state all the more daunting.

We have a stake in supporting the new government as it confronts these challenges and strives to not just maintain, but build on the progress that has been made over the last 12 years. The President's announcement of our post-2014 presence is a step toward defining this long-term commitment. To support this agenda and ensure it is effective, we will need continuing support from Congress. Afghanistan will require significant U.S. and international attention for years to come—including continuing robust levels of development and security assistance.

In 2012, we joined with the rest of the international community in Tokyo to outline a program of sustained international support combined with an Afghan-led program of reform and institutional development. This "mutual accountability" acknowledged that foreign assistance would necessarily decline—but that we would seek to graduate that decline so as to protect the gains achieved with our support and investments. When Congress cut the fiscal year 2014 appropriation for Afghanistan by 50 percent, it noted the difficult bilateral relationship, and particularly the failure of the Afghan Government to sign the BSA, as well as the existing funding pipeline.

We believe the President's fiscal year 2015 foreign assistance request for Afghanistan, although it represents an increase from the previous appropriation, reestablishes a responsible, downward trajectory for our assistance and reflects what we expect to be a productive working relationship with the new Afghan Government and the reality of a much diminished pipeline. As we reduce our assistance over time, it is critical that we defend the gains made over the past year, including by Afghan women and girls, and give the Afghan Government the time and space necessary to build sustainable sources of revenue.

Later this year, the United Kingdom has agreed to organize a conference to review progress since Tokyo, and to enable the new Afghan Government to present its plan for inclusive economic growth and increasing sustainability. As I mentioned earlier, the challenges, most notably corruption, are significant, but they are issues that the current Presidential candidates stressed during the campaign.

Both candidates have also talked about the need for a process of political reconciliation to bring an end to the bloodshed and violence that has wracked Afghanistan for three decades and ensure its long-term stability. The specifics of such an effort will be for the new Afghan President to decide, but United States will continue to support steps that improve the climate for an Afghan-led reconciliation process. Our objective has been and continues to be to promote and support a political process by which Afghans sit down with other Afghans to determine the future of their country. Both Presidential candidates have promised to pursue efforts at peace and reconciliation. This past weekend again demonstrated the desire of the Afghan people for peace, their determination to decide their future for themselves, and their

commitment to do so through free elections. That underscores the conviction we share with the Afghan people that, as part of the outcome of any reconciliation process, the Taliban and other insurgent groups must break ties with al-Qaeda, end violence, and accept Afghanistan's Constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.

One of the potentially positive factors weighing in favor of stability in Afghanistan is the increasing convergence of regional interests. States across the region are recognizing that their stability is linked to Afghanistan's stability and prosperity. Late last year, after President Karzai chose to delay signing the BSA, President Xi, President Putin, Prime Minister Singh, and Prime Minister Sharif each engaged with him to urge that he conclude the agreement. It is extraordinary that the Russians, Chinese, Indians, and Pakistanis would all support the continuation of a U.S. and NATO military mission in Afghanistan for at least several more years.

Clearly, as this unusual conjunction of regional views indicates, the U.S. and NATO drawdown is a source of anxiety for regional powers. Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and China all fear Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for their own hostile militant groups. India fears Afghanistan again becoming a training ground for terrorist groups targeting them. Russia remains concerned about the flow of narcotics. Iran and Pakistan fear new floods of refugees. For the present these varying concerns have led to a convergence of policy, in favor, Iran excepted, of a continued U.S. and NATO presence, and in support of the existing constitutional regime in Kabul. The United States consults with all of these countries in various multilateral forums, and, again with the exception of Iran, also does so on a frequent bilateral basis.

There remains, however, great untapped potential from connecting Afghanistan economically with its neighbors to the north and south. This is why we are working to promote regional economic connectivity in the broader South and Central Asia region through the New Silk Road initiative. Increased economic connectivity will also improve regional security and stability by giving Afghanistan's neighbors a bigger stake in Afghanistan's future. Of course, regional connectivity in South and Central Asia is a challenging undertaking in the world's least economically integrated region. We have seen encouraging steps such as improved trade, transportation, and energy links between Afghanistan and Central Asia. To help create a regional Central Asia-South Asia energy market, the United States is supporting the CASA-1000 electricity transmission project, which when completed, will enable Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to supply 1,300 megawatts of surplus summer hydropower to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

While we have serious differences with Russia on Ukraine, we continue to value our dialogue with Moscow over Afghanistan, including on discussions with Russia and Central Asia on counternarcotics. China will soon host a large regional meeting focused on addressing a number of common challenges. Prime Minister Modi of India invited both President Karzai and Prime Minister Sharif to join other regional leaders at Modi's inaugural, demonstrating his interest in regional cooperation.

Of all these powers, Pakistan probably has the greatest potential for influence over Afghanistan's future evolution, for better or worse. In the past, Pakistan has projected influence into Afghanistan via its toleration of, and even support for, Afghan militants. The growth of an indigenous militant threat to Pakistan's own constitutional order, in the form of the Pakistani Taliban or TTP, and the many links between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, along with the several other militant and terrorist groups active there, have made this an increasingly costly and ultimately unsustainable strategy. After an extended effort to negotiate with the TTP, Prime Minister Sharif has ordered a major military offensive designed, we are told, to clear all militants, foreign and domestic, out of their major stronghold in North Waziristan. In the short term this offensive will present challenges to Afghanistan, as innocent civilian refugees, along with Afghan, Pakistani, and other foreign militants flee across the border. In the longer term, however, if the Pakistani authorities deliver on their promise to deny the use of their territory to all militant groups, foreign as well as domestic, this effort will significantly enhance security in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In 2001 parts of Kabul looked like Berlin at the end of the Second World War. In December of that year, when I reopened the American Embassy as the first post 9/11 U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan, Kabul was a ruined city, ravaged by decades of invasion, civil war, and Taliban autocracy; the capital of a country that had no police force, no military, no ministries, no judicial system, few schools. Societies take a long time to recover from historical trauma of this magnitude, but only 13 years later, Afghanistan has millions of children in school, an increasingly effective defense and police force, a professional independent media, and a functioning political system. These institutions, working together, were able to carry out two nationwide elections in the space of 2 months, despite bad weather, an active insurgency,

and a short tradition of democratic practice. The Afghans have repeatedly demonstrated their desire for democracy and rule of law and to interact with other countries in the region and the world as a sovereign nation with its own traditions.

We have read for years about continued prevalence of violence, high levels of corruption, limited governmental capacity and misdirected foreign assistance. All of this is undoubtedly true. Yet despite these genuine deficiencies longevity in Afghanistan has risen by 20 years since 2001, the largest such leap in life expectancy that any society has ever achieved over such a short period. Twice as many Afghans can read and write today as could in 2001, and twice as many again will be able to do so 10 years from now. Poverty and corruption have replaced insecurity as the prime voter concerns in much of the country. Yet despite these real and well-grounded concerns, polling continually reveals that most Afghans see their lives improving, have a positive assessment of their government, are confident in the capacity of their army and police and are optimistic about their future.

This optimism will be tested in the years ahead. As NATO forces continue to draw down economic growth will slow and the Afghan security forces will be repeatedly challenged. The Afghans, other regional governments, our NATO partners and the international donor community will all be looking to United States to continue to lead in supporting the continued consolidation and extension of the dramatic changes that have already taken place in that country. Our ability to do so will depend upon the willingness of Congress to continue to respond positively to this and future administrations' requests for security and economic assistance funding, even as the overall costs of our engagement in Afghanistan will continue to decline rapidly.

The CHAIRMAN. I am sure there will be questions where you will be able to fill out anything you have not done.

Ms. Magsamen.

STATEMENT OF KELLY E. MAGSAMEN, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, ASIAN AND PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Thank you. I will try to keep this short.

Chairman Menendez, Senator Corker, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the United States mission in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and the regional implications of our transition.

First, I would like to thank our men and women of the Armed Forces who have fought and served in Afghanistan, as well as our incredibly capable diplomats like Ambassador Dobbins and other civilians from across the interagency. We have not forgotten what brought us to Afghanistan more than a decade ago, and our core objectives are clear: disrupt threats posed by al-Qaeda, support Afghan security forces, and give the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed as they stand on their own.

Since 2001, our forces have placed constant pressure on al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks operating in the region. United States and NATO forces have also helped develop and enable the Afghan National Security Forces to provide security for their own country.

Since assuming the lead for security across Afghanistan exactly 1 year ago today, the ANSF has proven resilient and capable. With minimal coalition assistance, Afghan forces now plan and execute nearly all combat operations, continue to improve their capacity to execute large, joint combat operations, and demonstrate tactical superiority over insurgents.

Most recently, the ANSF demonstrated their capability to provide effective security for the Afghan people during both the first and the second rounds of the Presidential elections. The Afghan Government and its security forces worked closely to prepare for

the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. Twice this year, Afghans have defied the Taliban-led insurgency when they turned out in large numbers to cast their votes. The performance of the ANSF during these two rounds is a major milestone in our efforts to develop a capable force that is accountable to the Afghan people.

The ongoing drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces reflects the progress that the ANSF has made. Yet, much work remains to develop a self-sufficient ANSF. Throughout the end of this year, U.S. forces will continue to provide the time and space for the Afghan Government and security forces to increase their capacity. By next year, Afghans will be fully responsible for securing their country, and we will be in an advisory role pending the conclusion of a United States-Afghanistan bilateral security agreement and a NATO-Afghanistan status of forces agreement.

As President Obama announced on May 27, the United States intends to maintain a limited military presence of 9,800 forces in Afghanistan in 2015 and provide the bulk of forces for the follow-on NATO mission known as Resolute Support. A post-2014 U.S. military presence will have two objectives: training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Security Forces as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission, and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al-Qaeda.

In 2015, the NATO-led train, advise, and assist mission will focus at the corps level and above to develop further capabilities in aviation, intelligence, and special operations, as well as the capacity of Afghan security ministries. As part of the NATO mission, the United States will also focus on ensuring effective use of future U.S. assistance to the ANSF. By the end of next year, the U.S. force presence should be reduced by roughly half and consolidated in Kabul and Bagram.

In 2016, our focus will be on advising at the ministerial level to ensure contracting, procurement, and financial management practices. By the end of 2016, the U.S. military forces would be limited to a Kabul-based presence with a strong security assistance component to assist in sustaining the ANSF. A security cooperation office in Afghanistan will serve as the mechanism for continued security cooperation with the Afghan Government in areas of mutual interest, much as we do around the world. It will also allow us to maintain an enduring relationship with the ANSF and continue to build their capacity.

Beyond the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, the United States will continue to have, as the Ambassador reflected, national security interests in South and Central Asia. These include preventing terrorist groups from threatening our homeland, our citizens, and our interests, addressing terrorism and extremism in Pakistan, and advancing a stable, secure, and independent Central Asia. To pursue these interests, we will continue to conduct security cooperation with these countries in the region.

In closing, the steps that United States forces and our NATO partners have taken in Afghanistan, as well as our efforts to build partner capacity in the region, will help set the conditions for regional security in the years ahead, even as challenges remain.

Achieving improved regional stability will require sustained U.S. leadership and engagement.

I would like to thank this committee for its leadership and support of the United States military mission in Afghanistan, as well as your continuing support of our men and women in uniform and our diplomats and other civilians. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Magsamen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KELLY E. MAGSAMEN

Chairman Menendez, Senator Corker, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the U.S. mission in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and the regional security implications of our transition. It is also an honor to speak alongside Ambassador Dobbins.

First, I would like to thank the men and women of our armed forces who have fought and served in Afghanistan, as well as our incredibly capable diplomats and other civilians from across the interagency. We have not forgotten what brought us to Afghanistan more than a decade ago. Since 2001, our forces have placed constant pressure on al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks operating in the region and have helped develop and enable the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to provide security for their country. Our core objectives in Afghanistan are clear: disrupt threats posed by al-Qaeda; support Afghan security forces; and give the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed as they stand on their own.

Since assuming the lead responsibility for security across the country 1 year ago, the ANSF—composed of 336,306 personnel—are now successfully providing security for the people of Afghanistan. Afghan forces plan and execute nearly all combat operations, and continue to improve their capacity to execute large, joint combat operations across the country with minimal coalition assistance. The ANSF have proven resilient and capable, demonstrating tactical superiority over the insurgents during the last fighting season and already during this fighting season.

The ANSF most recently demonstrated their ability to provide effective security for the Afghan people in the first and second rounds of their Presidential elections. The Afghan Government and its security forces have worked closely—on an unprecedented level—to prepare for the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. Twice this year, Afghans have defied the Taliban-led insurgency and turned out in large numbers to vote for their democratic future, including a turnout of nearly 7 million voters in the first round. ANSF performance during these two rounds is a major milestone in our efforts to develop a capable force that is credible in the eyes of the Afghan people.

Although the drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces reflects the progress that the ANSF have made, there is still much work to do to develop ANSF capacity toward sustainment. Through the end of this year, our mission will continue to provide the time and space for the Afghan Government and security forces to increase their capacity and assume full responsibility for Afghanistan's security. Starting next year, Afghans will be fully responsible for securing their country and we will be in an advisory role.

The Department of Defense is committed to a responsible drawdown of U.S. forces and an appropriately resourced follow-on NATO mission in Afghanistan. As President Obama announced on May 27, the United States intends to maintain a military presence of 9,800 forces in Afghanistan in early 2015, and provide the bulk of forces for the follow-on NATO mission, known as Resolute Support. A continued U.S. and NATO military presence is conditioned upon the conclusion of the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement and NATO-Afghanistan Status of Forces Agreement. The post-2014 NATO mission will advise the continued development of security activities to the Afghans as the international community seeks to normalize its relationship with Afghanistan. NATO is expected to approve the Resolute Support operational plan at the NATO Foreign Ministerial on June 24, and will convene a force generation conference later this summer to align national contributions with operational requirements.

As Secretary Hagel stated after President Obama's force level announcement, our enduring presence "will help ensure that al-Qaeda cannot reconstitute itself in Afghanistan, and it will help us sustain the significant progress we have made in training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces." To that end, the post-2014 U.S. military presence will have two objectives: training, advising, and assisting Afghan forces as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al-Qaeda.

The NATO-led train, advise, and assist mission will be directed at the corps-level and above. As part of this mission, the United States will complement Afghan security efforts by closing institutional capability gaps, sustaining major equipment, and ensuring effective use of future U.S. assistance to the ANSF. The advisory mission will continue to build ministerial capacity and fielded force capabilities as the ANSF matures to become a professional and sustainable security force. Advisors will assist the Afghan security ministries, army corps, and police zones with performing tasks such as planning, programming, budgeting, acquisition, and human resource management so they can provide the required support to tactical units. For the fielded force, advisors will address gaps in aviation, intelligence, and special operations, as well as logistics, medical, and counterimprovised explosive device (IED) capabilities.

By the end of 2015, the U.S. force presence should be reduced to roughly half the levels from the beginning of that year and consolidated in Kabul and at Bagram Airfield. In 2016, a continued advisory effort would be embedded at the ministerial/institutional level to address anticipated shortfalls in financial management, procurement, and contracting. By the end of 2016, the U.S. military would be limited to a Kabul-based presence, with a strong security assistance component to sustain the ANSF. Beyond 2016, a Security Cooperation Office in Afghanistan would serve as the basis for continued strategic cooperation with the Afghan Government in areas of mutual interest, including advancing regional security and cooperation. It would also allow us to maintain an enduring relationship with the ANSF, build partner capacity, and preserve the access and influence necessary to help ensure stability in Afghanistan and the region. We will use the coming years to continue building a strong relationship with Afghanistan through security assistance-related activities, such as military education and training exercises.

Sustained ANSF and coalition efforts have prevented al-Qaeda's use of Afghanistan as a platform for terrorism. These efforts have forced al-Qaeda to focus on survival rather than on operations against the West. Despite our success in degrading core al-Qaeda, remnants remain in the border region and coordinate with other extremist organizations, such as the Haqqani Network, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Beyond 2014, U.S. forces will remain focused on denying safe haven to al-Qaeda and keeping pressure on the extremist network to limit the operational ability of transnational and foreign military groups inside Afghanistan.

The United States will continue to have national security interests in South and Central Asia beyond the drawdown of our forces in Afghanistan. These include preventing terrorist groups from threatening our homeland, U.S. interests, and citizens; addressing terrorism and extremism in Pakistan; and advancing a stable, secure, and independent Central Asia. To pursue these interests, we will continue to conduct security cooperation with countries in the region to help promote strategic stability on the subcontinent.

Security cooperation with Pakistan has helped facilitate counterinsurgency operations that constrain al-Qaeda and militant groups like the Pakistani Taliban, which threaten the United States, Pakistan, and other countries in the region. For example, Coalition Support Funds have helped the Pakistan military maintain more than 125,000 troops in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and security assistance—to include equipment such as night vision devices and radios—has improved Pakistan's counterinsurgency and counterterrorism capabilities. The delivery of upgraded F-16s to Pakistan led to the increased effectiveness of their air operations, especially in night strikes that limit militant freedom of movement.

U.S. support and engagement have also contributed to counterterrorism cooperation against al-Qaeda and to Pakistan's efforts to disrupt IED networks responsible for attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan's counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and counter-IED efforts will remain critical as we continue the drawdown in Afghanistan. U.S. support to Pakistan also supplements its efforts to improve internal stability, which is vital for improved stability in the region. It is therefore essential that we maintain defense cooperation with Pakistan at close to current levels through 2016.

The Central Asian states are also an important facet of the regional security landscape. In addition to the assistance these nations provide directly to Afghanistan through trade, building infrastructure, supplying electricity, and education resources, Central Asia has steadily supported U.S. efforts in Afghanistan by allowing the transit of military materiel and personnel through their territories as part of the Northern Distribution Network. Since the independence of Central Asian nations in 1991, the United States has supported the ability of these states to maintain their sovereignty and independence by building their capability to secure their borders, counter narcotraffickers and extremists, and better manage their defense and security institutions. The United States will continue to pursue these interests during and following the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

In addition to our bilateral security cooperation efforts, the United States will continue to play a mediation role in the region. Cross-border militant attacks remain a challenge to maintaining positive relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition to attacks by Pakistan-based militants in Afghanistan, we are growing more concerned about Afghanistan-based militants launching attacks in Pakistan. These attacks have contributed to an uptick in border clashes between the two countries. In recent instances, Pakistan attempted to de-escalate clashes using the procedures put in place by Islamabad and Kabul, with facilitation from ISAF and the Office of Defense Representative–Pakistan. Maintaining a strong relationship with the Pakistan military and the ANSF will be necessary to mitigate future flareups. We intend to press both Islamabad and Kabul for greater cooperative measures after the new Afghan administration takes office. In addition, an improved relationship between Pakistan and India is essential to regional stability. The recent engagement between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and newly elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is cause for cautious optimism. Recognizing the important role the United States has to play in terms of regional engagement, we hold trilateral dialogues with Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with Afghanistan and India. These meetings are held in addition to formal and informal bilateral engagements with each of these countries on issues relating to regional security.

In sum, the steps that U.S. forces and our NATO partners have taken in Afghanistan, as well as efforts to build partner capacity in the region, will help set the conditions for regional security in the years ahead. Achieving improved regional stability will require sustained U.S. leadership and engagement in the region.

I would like to thank this committee for its leadership and support of the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan, as well as for your continuing support of our men and women in uniform and of our diplomats and other civilians. I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you both for your testimony.

Ambassador Dobbins, let me ask you. As I said in my opening statement, Afghanistan is not Iraq, but the deterioration of the security environment in the latter raises questions about the announced plans to withdraw United States combat troops by the end of 2016. I am concerned that the timeline emboldens militants in the country who will simply wait out the departure of U.S. forces.

So can you give the committee a sense of the deliberations which led to the decision to eliminate the operational and support role for U.S. troops by 2016, and what are the opportunity costs to not maintaining a more significant military presence there beyond 2016?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think the main lines of analysis were the pace at which the Afghan Armed Forces could repair or address the continuing deficiencies. I think Kelly can probably answer this in more detail. But the general discussion said that they are capable of independent tactical and operational actions, but that some of the higher level capabilities still need further development. These would include program budgeting, personnel management, maintenance, sustainability of the force, those kinds of higher level management issues at the ministerial and corps level. And given that the improvements that have been made in their tactical and operational capabilities over the last several years, these should be fixable within the timeframe that has been set out.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let me ask you, Ms. Magsamen. Given the lack of capacity in logistics and air support, if we think that they have made so much progress that what is left to be finished can be done in 2 years, how do you think they will perform without the capacity in logistics and air support after 2016?

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Let me say a quick thing on the timeline. I think when we were deliberating on this, the timeline is in our view appropriate to where the ANSF is currently and where we see

their shortfalls and how we are going to spend the next 2 years addressing those shortfalls. And as I said earlier in my opening remarks, they are performing quite well at the tactical level and operational level. They are performing more complex joint operations. They are doing 99 percent of conventional operations right now, about 98 percent of special operations.

The CHAIRMAN. No. I appreciate that. I heard you. I listen to testimony when it is given here.

But I want to get to my point. Looking at the ANSF now is one thing. Looking at the ANSF 2 years from now is another. And the question is without air support and logistical abilities, how do you think they will be able to perform.

Ms. MAGSAMEN. I cannot really speculate how they are going to perform in 2016, but what I can tell you is that air support—

The CHAIRMAN. Well, but you have made that determination by deciding that you are going to withdraw by 2016. So someone made a determination that you can judge because otherwise you could not withdraw by 2016.

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Yes, sir. In our judgment, the areas we are planning to focus on over the next 2 years include aviation, they include intelligence, they include logistics and sustainment like I said. These are going to be the areas of focus that General Dunford and ISAF are going to be focusing on post-2014. As you know, aviation is a long-term and complex set of programs, but this is going to be an area of focus for us. We are going to have 9,800 troops by the end of the year. They are going to be there. This is not like we are dropping off a cliff at the end of this year. We are going to continue to do training and advising and assisting in these areas. We do think they are capable, and we do think they can get there. It is complex. It is going to be a long-term effort with the ANSF. It is going to require a long-term international commitment, but we are confident that the ANSF is making progress. I think they have demonstrated that progress over the last two rounds of elections. They are demonstrating it every day through all the operations that they are conducting. And, yes, there are shortfalls and we are cognizant of those shortfalls, but we are working to fill them.

The CHAIRMAN. There is a difference. And I do applaud them for what they did during the elections. But there is a difference between that and a full-fledged frontal attack by those who may be emboldened to thinking that the United States will not be there. And I hope to God that they are capable of doing so because after so many American lives and national treasure, I would hate for us to see losses.

I did not vote for the war in Iraq because I think that was a colossal mistake, probably one of the most consequential decisions that was ever made in the recent history of the United States. It has cost us trillions of dollars and thousands of lives. And so as far as I am concerned, that was a colossal mistake.

But I did vote for Afghanistan. That is where Bin Laden was. That is where al-Qaeda was. That is where the perpetrators of September 11 were. Those towers were where 700 of my citizens in New Jersey were taken and 3,000 Americans were taken. So I am not about to just walk away, although I certainly am far from a warmonger by any stretch of the imagination. But I am concerned

that we are not doing what will be necessary in order to achieve the long-term benefits.

Let me ask you about the region. As I traveled through the region and most recently in the gulf, all I heard is: Are you going to stay? And then we had the announcement. Unfortunately, that announcement was while I was in the gulf and I did not know about it. And the reality is that there is significant concern.

So, Ambassador, talk to me about the regional implications and what we are looking at in terms of the region because when I was in Pakistan, they wanted to know if we were going to stay, and they were making judgments based on that. And obviously they are going to make judgments now. I see that they launched some efforts in certain parts of Pakistan and along the region there that is contiguous with Afghanistan, but I doubt they are going to do very much to the Haqqani Network as part of that. So talk to me about the regional consequences of the decision as well.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, I would say most regional powers are relieved that we are not leaving right away. They are relieved that the zero option is no longer considered probable. They are relieved that we will have a significant presence there next year. And most of them would like us to have it there longer. In fact, probably most of them would like us to stay indefinitely.

There are exceptions to that and significant exceptions. I would guess that Russia, China, and Iran are all pleased that there is an end date to our presence. The Russians and the Chinese I think both are glad we are staying for a while, but they are glad it is only a relatively brief while.

As to what we need to do, we do need to capitalize on what degree of consensus there is. We need to continue to work the trade and regional economic integration piece which both aids Afghan development but even more importantly gives everybody in the region a stake in Afghan stability as their own prosperity depends in growing measure on trade links that include Afghanistan. And so this is an important area that we, along with our South and Central Asian Bureau, continue to work on very actively.

We need to continue to engage the major players in the region, India, Pakistan, China, Russia, bilaterally as well as in the several multilateral forums which exist to talk about at the moment the Afghan elections, to talk about the transition, to talk about how some of those countries can continue to assist both the Afghan security forces and Afghan stability more generally. We have not, in recent years, talked bilaterally to the Iranians, but they are included in a number of the multilateral forums that we engage in consultations in as well.

I think you accurately perceive the concerns of the regional powers, and as I said, from their standpoint what they got was I think they appreciated the greater clarity about our intentions for next year. I have not heard complaints about next year, but as you have heard, some of them are concerned about—

The CHAIRMAN. I think all of us who care about the commitment we have made here are glad to see this. I never believed the zero option was real except if we did not get a security agreement. I think it would have been disastrous. So I guess they are relieved by having the affirmation that we are not leaving, but I do not

know how relieved they are from my conversations about the declared time period in which we are going to leave.

There are a lot of questions here that I would like to ask you about. Sustainability of projects is one. If you want more money, we are going to have to see the sustainability of projects at the end of the day. And also I have questions about the post-election process and what we are doing. But there are a lot of members here. So let me turn to Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that on the sustainability issue, I am with you. I got to tell you I think most of us have been shocked by the massive amount of nation-building that had no relevance to security, and I do hope we will go through those with a fine-tooth comb. And I hope the State Department will bring us to understand the purpose of those and how they will be sustained.

But back to the number of security forces. I know this was a long and contorted decision, one that could have been made some time ago, as soon as the Presidential candidates, all of them, said they were going to sign the agreement. But the decision process was contorted. There were people, were there not, Mr. Dobbins, within the administration pushing for zero? Is that true?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not recall anybody explicitly pushing for it in any meeting I attended. So formally not. And I attended virtually every meeting.

Senator CORKER. People have predicted what is happening in Iraq. Many people on the dais have been talking about what would happen in Iraq if we did what we did with a no Syria policy, with leaving the way that we left, and with having a Prime Minister that is not governing his country in the appropriate way. So even though people knew it was going to happen and even though you saw indications of what was happening, have the recent events in Iraq in any way caused people to reassess declaring the zero option in 2016 for Afghanistan?

Ambassador DOBBINS. You know, as Chairman Menendez said, Afghanistan is not Iraq. I quite understand the analogy you are making which is, to a degree, a fair analogy, that if you leave too early, most of your investment can be lost as a result. I am not arguing against that. I am arguing that in Afghanistan we are doing just the opposite of that.

And the situations are very different. In Iraq, the people did not want us and not a single Iraqi politician was prepared to advocate our staying. In Afghanistan, the people overwhelmingly want us to stay, and every single contender in the Presidential election said they would sign the BSA. In Iraq, they could get along without us, at least temporarily because they had plenty of money. In Afghanistan, they cannot possibly get along without us.

Senator CORKER. Well, just since you said that, in a sense they want us there, and I agree with that analogy although I am not sure we could not have still worked an arrangement in Iraq that is different than what it is and what it has been. I think you would agree with that.

How did we decide 2015, 2016? In other words, yes, the country welcomes us. Yes, it is the apparatus which we are using for intelligence. Yes, it matters a lot to the region. So since both the

Presidential candidates that are in the lead have said stay, why is it we announced that we were going to leave in 2016 and have the specific numbers in each year?

Ambassador DOBBINS. You know, I do not think the decision in Afghanistan was made in a vacuum. I wrote six or seven books on Afghanistan, Iraq, and on post-conflict stabilization during the 10 years I was outside the Government. And anybody who has read those knows that my view is more is better. More money, more time, more manpower gets you better results.

But resources are finite. All I have to worry about is Afghanistan and Pakistan. But the President and you have to worry about every other place in the world where U.S. resources, U.S. money, U.S. troops, and the time and attention of high-level policymakers are needed. And it was against that background of a metastasizing threat from al-Qaeda and similar groups, a spread of that threat to a number of other societies, the fragmentation that is occurring in a lot of other countries which are now in a lot worse shape than Afghanistan is that the decision was made to take a calculated risk. We thought 2 years would be enough. And on that basis, the President made a decision because there are a lot of other claims on those resources.

Senator CORKER. Well, since you attended all those meetings and you heard all the tongue and cheek comments that take place in these kind of meetings, is your sense that this was basically a throwaway comment for public consumption and if things on the ground deteriorated, that the President would actually be very open to ensuring that the gains that have been so hard-fought are kept in place?

Ambassador DOBBINS. No, I do not think the President is disposed to review this decision.

Senator CORKER. So this is an absolute, regardless of conditions on the ground, you all absolutely made a decision that this is the way it is going to be.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I believe the President has made a decision which he intends to keep, which carries us through 2016. Now, I cannot speak for what would happen if there were massive diversions from expectations, but I do not think the President is disposed at present to review this decision.

Senator CORKER. It is amazing when we talk to people within the administration that know things like this and are pretty tuned in. They say, hey, guys, do not worry about this. This is just a plan. We are going to reassess. But you are telling me as a special envoy, this is concrete. Right now, this is not just a plan, but this is the way it is going to be.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think this reflects the President's intentions.

Senator CORKER. Let me ask you this question. The leadership there that is on the ground—I think all of us know both of the candidates that are in the finals and have had, I am sure, multiple meetings with each of them. Do you view either one of the winners as an improvement over the leadership that we now have in Afghanistan? It is not much of a bar I know.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think President Karzai's leadership will probably have to be evaluated in hindsight over the entire 10 or

12 years of his presence there. I was instrumental in his initial selection to run the provisional government. I think he has made a major contribution in putting Afghanistan on a path toward constitutionalism and democracy. I think he has done a remarkably good job of bringing together the various ethnic and sectarian and linguistic and religious groups and overcoming those kinds of obstacles. He has done this through a process of distributing patronage, which has the side effect of increasing corruption but also has the side effect in a country that has very weak institutions of creating constituencies in every single ethnic and religious and linguistic group in the country for the central government, for constitutional order. And that is a significant contribution.

Now, in the last couple of years, our relations have deteriorated seriously. I think either one of the candidates will devote significant effort to improving that relationship. I believe there will be responsiveness here to that, and I believe that, therefore, the relationship will significantly improve.

I would also say that President Karzai seems to be playing a balanced and constructive effort to try to bring this electoral process to a conclusion that everybody in Afghanistan can accept. We are not there yet. It is going to be a difficult several weeks I think until we get there. And I think his leadership is going to be continually important in that regard as well.

Senator CORKER. If I could, Ms. Magsamen, this is my final question. I know you keep throwing out the security office—or you have a couple times in your answers to questions and your presentation—at the Embassy. And it is almost as if to placate people who are concerned—or at least that is the way I hear it—that are concerned about this absolute drawdown. Could you tell us just a little bit about what the security office within the walls of the Embassy will do relative to making the country and also the region more secure?

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Thank you, Senator, for the question. I think it is an important one because, as you know, around the world we have this kind of security cooperation office. We manage a ton of very complex security and defense relationships with partners like Jordan, with partners like Colombia. And, sir, you can pick your different version. They all vary in how they operate. We will tailor the office of security cooperation in Afghanistan to the Afghans' needs. It will afford us an opportunity to provide continued advice to the ANSF and assistance and execute security assistance through that office and process it and help work with the Afghans in terms of improving their programming and planning and budgeting.

So the OSCs can perform a variety of functions. It is not purely just a throughput for moneys. It is actually an opportunity for us to engage the Afghans to maintain channels of influence frankly with the ANSF through the Embassy as well. So these offices of security cooperation around the world can perform very complex functions.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for being here.

Ambassador Dobbins, you talked about the Iraqis never wanting us to stay and the Afghans not wanting us to leave.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes.

Senator SHAHEEN. What kind of an impact is what is happening currently in Iraq having in Afghanistan?

Ambassador DOBBINS. You know, I have not seen any reverberations within Afghanistan to date. I am not sure the Afghans themselves, at least the man on the street, see much of a relationship, and they are pretty focused on their own problems and their own political process at the moment.

Senator SHAHEEN. So is it having any impact on the potential for reconciliation negotiations to occur between the Taliban and the new leadership in Afghanistan once it is decided?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think there is a prospect for renewed—and “renewed” may be too strong a term because there was not much of a process before, but for more meaningful efforts at reconciliation once a new government takes office. And it will depend on, first of all, the quality of the electoral process and whether it is divisive in the country or whether it unites the country behind a successor President.

Secondly, I think the success of Afghan security forces during the electoral process will give the Taliban pause.

Thirdly, if we complete the drawdown and if at the end of the year, Afghan security forces have continued to hold their ground and the Taliban is not making ground, I think all of those factors will go into their decisionmaking. They tend to fight during the spring and summer and talk among themselves during the fall and winter, and I would anticipate that that process of talking among themselves may well yield differences. Both of the Presidential candidates have indicated a willingness to engage in a reconciliation process and negotiation with the Taliban. The Taliban have clearly not been willing to talk to Karzai in the short term, but I think there is some prospect that they will be willing to do so as the result of all of those factors.

Senator SHAHEEN. And are there any particular leverage points that we think the Afghan Government is going to have in potential negotiations with the Taliban? I hear you say that if the security forces maintain their ability to maintain security in the country, that that provides leverage. But there has been not a lot. There have been some reports that the Taliban are just waiting until we withdraw our troops and then they intend to reengage in a way that would make it difficult for the security forces to continue to maintain the gains that they have achieved.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not think we have any intelligence which would support the view that the Taliban has been pulling its punches over the last year and a half. I think insofar as we have an assessment, it has been that they have continued to try to hurt us, to make our withdrawal as difficult and painful as possible, to disrupt the elections, to disrupt the Afghan security forces. And so far, they have largely failed in that regard.

Now, in terms of points of leverage, we have already talked about the Afghan points of leverage, and I think the other main source of leverage on them is going to be, for better or worse, the behavior of Pakistan.

Senator SHAHEEN. One of the real concerns I think that exists once we withdraw is what happens to some of the gains that have occurred in Afghanistan, particularly for women. And I wonder if you can speak to what we anticipate might happen there.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, I think there have been some remarkable gains that are going to be difficult to roll back. You have had a 20-year increase in longevity, the largest such increase any society in the world has sustained in such a short period in human history. Twice as many Afghans can read and write today as could read and write a decade ago. That is not going to go away. And if the kids stay in school for another 10 years, twice as many Afghans again will read and write 10 years from now as can read and write today.

You have had massive urbanization. People have moved away from their tribal, ethnic, and familial roots into more cosmopolitan urban centers.

You have had a massive increase in communications, 75 TV stations broadcasting, largely national, not narrowly sectarian news and commentary. You have had cell phone coverage over 90 percent of the country.

And in terms of attitudes, not only are women participating in elections, not only are women going in schools in massive numbers, but there have been changes in attitudes registered in polling so that now most Afghans believe women should be educated. Most Afghans believe women should vote. The get-out-the-vote among women in this last election was assisted by a number of religious leaders who are arguing that women should be allowed to and encouraged to vote. Those are changes that will not be reversed overnight.

Now, if the Taliban overruns the country and takes control again, I do not even think they would be able to bring the country back to 2001. But I agree that it would be a significant reversal of what we have achieved, and that is why we are going to continue to cooperate with the Afghan Government and the Afghan people to prevent it.

Senator SHAHEEN. Ms. Magsamen, I am not pronouncing your last name correctly.

Ms. MAGSAMEN. It is Magsamen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Can you talk about the prospects for our drawdown of troops, what that might do to extremist movements in Pakistan? What is the impact going to be there? And have we seen any change in how the Haqqani Network, some of the extremist groups view us after the Bergdahl prisoner exchange?

Ms. MAGSAMEN. In terms of the impact on Pakistan, I think we are getting ready to enter into a pretty critical period of transition, as the Ambassador talked about. And as I think everybody on this committee understands, security in Afghanistan is contingent on security in Pakistan and vice versa. This has been an area of intense focus, especially for General Dunford and General Austin, who have been engaging both the Pakistanis and the Afghans in particular on the importance of developing mechanisms to manage cross-border escalation among these groups.

I think the key going forward here is that we are going to continue to engage leaders on both sides about the importance of

managing and addressing the situation with extremists in the border region and putting into place mechanisms of cooperation and transparency, communication to manage border escalations. We recently had a few instances, as you probably know, on this. Like I said, the important part is putting in place these mechanisms. We have had sort of on and off bipartite military-to-military engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and basically I think the next few years, it is going to be incumbent upon the Afghans and the Pakistanis, with our encouragement, to continue to keep talking and sharing information.

In terms of the steps that you raise, Pakistan I think—they are an important CT partner for us. I think they are on a better trajectory in terms of the steps that they are taking, as you can see from the North Waziristan operations that are underway right now. I think that is an important step that Senator Corker pointed to earlier. There are places where our interests converge, and we work to cooperate with them. There are places where they diverge, and we engage them on those places as well. And we make very clear to the Pakistanis in particular our concerns about the Haqqani threat. We make that very clear and very direct across the inter-agency between State and the Department of Defense.

So we are watching closely what the Pakistanis are doing. They have taken steps. They are making gains. The Pakistanis have over 125,000 troops in the FATA. They are increasingly gaining control over territory. But at the end of the day, the situation in the FATA is really a long-term governance challenge for Pakistan, in addition to a security challenge. So we are encouraged by some of the steps they are making. Is it totally adequate? No, but we do think they are on the right trajectory.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. I am going to defer to Senator McCain. He has got an event.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.

Ambassador Dobbins, in late May, former senior Pentagon officials and leading counterterrorism analysts testified to Congress that the Taliban is on the verge of major resurgence. Do you agree with that assessment?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I have not seen any sign of it. I do think that our assessment is that as our forces draw down, they may be able to gain marginally more territory in rural areas. Maybe that is what he was addressing.

Senator MCCAIN. I am talking about several of them did.

Ambassador DOBBINS. If you are talking about overrunning major population centers, we do not see that.

Senator MCCAIN. You do not see a major resurgence on the part of the Taliban.

Did you personally recommend this drawdown, this date for withdrawal?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am not sure it is appropriate to go into specific recommendations. I think you were here when I said my clear personal—

Senator MCCAIN. When people are confirmed, they are asked if they would give their personal opinion, and they usually say yes and I think you did too. So if you do not want to answer it, do not answer it, but that is not what you committed, I think, to this committee when you were confirmed.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think you were here, Senator, when I said that my view is on these kinds of situations that more is better. More time, more money, more troops, more people yields better results. But it has to be made within a broader context. Throughout the discussions I and the State Department supported General Dunford's recommendations at every point without qualification.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you believe that this decision creates a higher or same or lower risk?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Than what?

Senator MCCAIN. For a resurgence of the Taliban and the—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Senator, I think if we kept 100,000 troops there, the risk would be lower, but there is absolutely no possibility of our doing that. The Congress would not support it. The American people would not support it, and we have got other commitments. So the question is not—

Senator MCCAIN. Let me get this right. It is 100,000 troops or total withdrawal? No, Ambassador Dobbins, do not tell me that please.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am sorry.

Senator MCCAIN. What most of us advocated and we are seeing this movie in Iraq is that by announcing a complete withdrawal, that we encourage the Taliban. They wait for us to leave. And I am predicting to you now, as I predicted what happened in Iraq, that you will see a resurgence of the Taliban and great damage done by the Taliban to the Afghan people. I predicted it in Iraq, Ambassador Dobbins, and I am predicting it now in Afghanistan because you have sent the signal that do not worry, hang on, we are leaving. And so for you to set up this straw man, like the President does, 100,000 or nothing, I am saying what most military experts that I know is that we needed a residual force as we had in South Korea, in Berlin, in Bosnia, in Japan. In most every country in which we fought a conflict, we left behind a residual force not to keep fighting but to stabilize the country.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, in Bosnia, we have removed all U.S. troops, but we do—

Senator MCCAIN. Sure, we have a residual force to stabilize the country. If you want to go through country by country, you want to go after the Korean war where we left 38,000 troops and Americans were war-weary then—they were very war-weary, but we stabilized what was a corrupt country with a corrupt dictator called Syngman Rhee at the time because they needed to make the transition to democracy. Now South Korea is a great success. Most experts would agree that if we had not left a residual force, that would not be the case. You are ignoring the lessons of history, sir.

So I ask again, do you think it is a higher or lower risk, the fact that we are pulling everybody out, not whether we are leaving 100,000 or not?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am sorry. I thought the question originally was whether the 9,800 is adequate. Your more broad question

is whether zero or a large Embassy military presence, but the absence of an independent military command in 2017 is enough.

You know, I think the answer is it depends. And my original testimony went through the four things that I think it mostly depends on. As I said, I think the President had to make his commitments and decisions with respect to Afghanistan based on a variety of other new threats and old threats. In the case of Korea, for instance, or Germany where troops remained after the stabilization phases, the principal threat continued to be in our view Chinese and Russian Communist aggression, and those were the—

Senator MCCAIN. Not the reason why we originally left a residual force there, Ambassador. The reason why we originally left a residual force in those places was to stabilize the country.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, it was to continue to defend against what we conceived as the principal direct threat to the United States.

Senator MCCAIN. And there is a direct threat to the United States of America if the al-Qaeda and ISIS and others gain control of that region. Maybe you do not believe that.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Absolutely. No, I agree with that. And I think there is a chance that what we are proposing will adequately meet that threat.

Senator MCCAIN. The question is whether a total withdrawal and announcement of it encourages the Taliban and increases dramatically the risk of the rise of the Taliban and further chaos in the country and further death and suffering and threats to the United States of America, which is why we went into Afghanistan to start with because of al-Qaeda being based there. It is a bad decision and we will pay a very heavy price for it.

Mr. Chairman, I have no more questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On any given year over the course of this conflict, total foreign assistance has represented an amount approximately equal to the GDP; in the last few years, maybe closer to 90 percent of GDP. That is not a completely fair statistic given the fact that only about 50 percent or less of assistance actually lands in Afghanistan. And you have seen some pretty remarkable growth rates of the economy as well.

But clearly, inside that country, there is a crippling fear that the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the diminution of aid that you referenced in your initial testimony is going to have a pretty catastrophic effect on the economy.

So you have made a recommendation that you would like to see aid from the Congress increased, but what are the conversations that we are having regionally with our allies to make sure that the economic support for the country is drawn down at a rate that will not lead to catastrophic collapse? And are we any closer to realizing some of the potential long-term assets that we have heard so much about in the country such as the vast mineral deposits that some have posited could lead to some pretty significant revenues for the government?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think the best estimates from the World Bank, the IMF, and others is that Afghanistan's growth rate will

and already has slowed significantly. It has been growing at a rate comparable to China's for the last 13 years, and that is not going to continue. I think they do anticipate that it will continue to grow. It is not going to go into negative growth is the current projection. But it will not grow very fast. And obviously, that deceleration is itself going to be a source of concern and will have an impact on some of the lives there. As you have indicated, Afghanistan is going to remain dependent on international assistance for some time.

On the military side, that is going to be largely a function of the threat. If the threat diminishes, their dependence on that is going to diminish commensurately. If the threat does not diminish, then it is very hard to see how they could possibly afford a security structure of the current dimensions at any time in the foreseeable future.

On the civilian side, I think we will be seeking assistance in the coming year that gets us back on the track which was a track of gradual diminution rather than abrupt diminution. So it would be a larger request than we received this year, but it would be a smaller request than we had requested this year and a smaller request than we received the year before last. So we do have a glide path. I cannot remember. It is about a 16-percent decrease over the next several years.

And I think the important thing to measure this against is what we were spending when we had 100,000 troops there or even this year, 50,000 troops. The costs of a security assistance program and a civilian assistance program are dwarfed by the costs of a continued large-scale military presence in the country.

Senator MURPHY. A question about their military's capabilities. Ms. Magsamen, you gave some pretty robust testimony on this subject. So maybe I will direct the question to you.

Admittedly, the last time I was there was a little bit over a year ago. I was impressed by the capabilities of a lot of the Afghan counterterrorism units. They are doing good work, but they, at the time, were deeply reliant on U.S. close air support. And I have not heard a lot of rosy estimates in the intervening year about the increased capabilities of the Afghan Air Force. So tell us about the ability for us to train up a competent air force, frankly, to many of our minds without buying a whole bunch-load of Russian helicopters to do the job so that when we leave, their very competent ground forces are not compromised by incompetent air capability.

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Sure. The Afghan Air Force is doing more support operations to the ANSF every day. Aviation programs, like I said earlier, I think are usually the longest lead time in terms of—you know, it is very complex to train pilots and to help them perform very complex operations with ground forces. This is something that is going to be an area of focus over the next couple of years.

We are, in fact, actually going to begin training Afghan A-29 pilots in January. So that is one of the areas. This is an area we are going to be focusing on a lot over the next 6 months.

So they are making progress. It is going to be long term. In terms of providing close air support beyond 2014, that is not what we currently have underway, but we will be training up their pilots and working with them on this. But it is going to be a long-term effort.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I know buying Russian helicopters is certainly controversial. I think it is important to recognize, first of all, they are a lot cheaper. And secondly, they are rather well-suited to operating at high altitudes, as is the case in Afghanistan.

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Dobbins, just to jump to one last subject. We had a hearing on AUMF here in which the administration made the case that even with a repeal of the 9/11 AUMF, they thought they had most of the powers inherent in article 2 to continue to do the kind of counterinsurgency efforts that they want to do across the globe. What are your thoughts on what a repeal of the AUMF would do for our capabilities and necessities inside Afghanistan over the next several years?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am not an expert on this question. I do not think we anticipate any diminution in our authorities with respect to Afghanistan over the next several years one way or the other. But I really have to beg off on the legal aspects of it, which I am not well versed in.

Senator MURPHY. Ms. Magsamen, do you have thoughts on the consequences of an AUMF repeal?

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Sure. So I would pretty much answer it the same way. I mean, an AUMF question extends far beyond Afghanistan, as you know, because AUMF gives us the authorities to operate globally against al-Qaeda and affiliated groups. So I will also beg off on the legal aspects of this question. We could take it for the record.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above was not available at the time this hearing went to press.]

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Thank you both for being here.

Ambassador Dobbins, I wanted to begin with your statement. You actually said something I agree with 100 percent. This mission began in 2001 to ensure that Afghanistan could never again be used by those who would plot against the United States or our allies, which was certainly the primary reason why we went in because 9/11 was coordinated from there.

So I wanted to analyze the recent decision made by the President in light of that stated goal, the recent decision to release five Taliban commanders and others back to Qatar.

The first thing I want to point to is this report from the State Department on terrorism, and it basically reads—these folks now have been released to Qatar. Qatar's monitoring of private individuals and charitable association contributions to foreign entities remain inconsistent. Qatari-based terrorist fundraisers, whether acting as individuals or as representatives of other groups, were a significant terrorist financing risk and may have supported terrorist groups in countries such as Syria.

I wanted to know what specifically has changed in Qatar between the time that report was released and June 1st when the Taliban deal was publicly announced to give the President confidence to overlook the problems outlined with Qatar's enforcement

mechanisms that were outlined in that State Department report. What has changed?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think a couple of things have changed. The first is we negotiated a fairly detailed agreement with Qatar covering the degree to which these individuals would be monitored and which their activities would be limited to ensure that they were not capable, during the year they would spend in Qatar, of contributing in any way to the conflict in Afghanistan. Secondly, the President spoke to and received personal assurances from the Emir of Qatar. And I think the combination of those two things gave us the assurance we required.

Finally, I would say that our experience to date—and obviously, it has only been a few weeks—has been that the Qataris are very assiduous in meeting all of those obligations.

Senator RUBIO. It has been about 2 weeks.

So the answer is that what has changed is that we got it in writing and they told us about it on the phone.

Ambassador DOBBINS. And, you know, personal commitments from leaders of states. It means something.

Senator RUBIO. But systemically nothing has changed in the government. It is primarily those two things and then, of course, the last 17 days you say they have done a pretty good job of it so far. Right?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes.

Senator RUBIO. By the way, these five operatives that were released were not just any five operatives. One was the Taliban's army chief of staff and the deputy defense minister. One was the deputy director of intelligence. A third was the military commander who coordinated Taliban operations with al-Qaeda. Another one oversaw an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan, and the last one planned attacks against the international coalition in Afghanistan.

Of these five individuals that have been released, how many do you think will return to the fight against us?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Ultimately, I think it is quite possible that all of them might. But I think "return to the fight" is something of a euphemism.

Senator RUBIO. How many of them will return to be active members of the Taliban?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Probably all of them. These people either were captured or surrendered within a few weeks of our arrival. All but one of them were captured or surrendered in 2001. One of them that you mentioned was captured a year later. So four of them had absolutely nothing to do with the insurgency. No connection with IED's or suicide bombing or any of those things. They were part of the Taliban government.

Senator RUBIO. Well, you would agree that their status, having been former detainees—

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think they will quite possibly return. They are middle- or late middle-aged individuals. They are not going to be on the battlefield in any meaningful way. So again, that is something of a euphemism. And it is not as if the Taliban have any lack of individuals like that.

Senator RUBIO. So if they are not that special, why did they want them back, all five of these in particular?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think they felt a sense of loyalty to them. I think they did want them back. I do not know that they wanted them back because they fill some deficiency.

Senator RUBIO. Well, but they wanted them all back, but why these five in particular if they are of such diminished value?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Because these were the five most senior ones.

Senator RUBIO. So your opinion is they do not have any special abilities or value that give the Taliban—

Ambassador DOBBINS. I would not go that far, but I think that the marginal utility from the Taliban standpoint is probably marginal.

Senator RUBIO. Let me move on to another issue. Of course, this has been mentioned a moment ago about what is going on with ISIL in Iraq and they are gaining in strength and so forth. And this is enlightening in light of the fact that on May 27, President Obama announced in the Rose Garden that all U.S. forces would depart Afghanistan, leaving behind a normal Embassy presence in Kabul with a security assistance component, “just as we have done in Iraq.”

So my question is, do you think if what is occurring in Iraq had occurred a month ago before the May 27 announcement—do you think the President would have reached the exact same decision that he announced on the 27th of May with regard to Afghanistan, given what we now see happening or occurring in Iraq?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am sorry.

Senator RUBIO. Had what is happening in Iraq over the last 10 days—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Would that have changed the President’s decision?

Senator RUBIO. Yes. Do you think that his decision regarding the status of forces in Afghanistan would have been different in terms of the numbers, the timing, the way it was phrased in terms of the timeline—

Ambassador DOBBINS. It might have changed the way it was phrased to avoid the Iraq comparison. But otherwise, I do not think the substance of the decision would change.

And I think you have to also ask yourself suppose in 2011 the Iraqis had asked us to stay for an additional 2 years and we had stayed for an additional 2 years and repaired some of the additional problems in their structure, might that have also led to improvements.

The President has not decided to pull out of Afghanistan. He has decided to stay there at this point 2½ more years and then to continue an Embassy presence beyond that. He believes and we have reason to believe that the Afghan political and security structures will have developed to that point where a continued financial assistance and a continued security assistance relationship will be adequate to allow them to continue—

Senator RUBIO. So if we reach the end of the 2½-year period or any time in between and it appears that the ability of the Afghans to prevent a repeat of Iraq is not sufficient, do you think the

President will reconsider this decision or the timeframe in which it was announced and so forth?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not think he is presently disposed to reconsider the decision.

Senator RUBIO. So in essence, what is occurring in Iraq is not weighing at all on what the President has announced or decided to do.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am not aware of any discussions with the President in the last 2 weeks about Afghanistan. So I do not know the answer to that question.

Senator RUBIO. The last question is the President—

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not have any reason to think that his view has changed.

Senator RUBIO. The President said that prisoner swaps happen at the end of wars. Is the administration planning to release any more Taliban prisoners in the runup to the 2016 deadline for removal of U.S. troops?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not know that there is any connection between the two. The administration continues to try to close Guantanamo by finding ways of transferring people who either do not present a threat or who can be sent to locations where that threat can be contained. I would anticipate that will continue—

Senator RUBIO. Well, the reason why there is a connection is because he said that at the end of wars—and he says the war in Afghanistan is over or coming to an end—it is normal to release prisoners or swap. When we get to that point in 2016 when, in fact, there is no military presence outside of our Embassy situation, do you know of any conversations occurring about what we would do with the rest of the Taliban prisoners since the war against the Taliban, according to the President, is now over?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not know of any conversations which link either the end of this year or the end of 2017 to prisoners in Guantanamo. There is an effect on prisoners being held in Afghanistan where we will lose our legal basis to hold any prisoners at the end of this year. Now, we do not hold any Afghan prisoners at all at the moment. We hold some non-Afghan prisoners in Afghanistan at the end of the year, and we will not be able to hold them after the end of the year.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to just follow up on the Bergdahl matter. I had not intended to get into it.

Senator Rubio stated a number of specific concerns about the five detainees that were released. Let me put some other facts on the table that have now been testified to in open session by Secretary Hagel. There is no evidence that any of the five were engaged in an activity or planning against the United States. It might have been because of how early they were arrested or surrendered, but there is no evidence that any of the five took any steps or were involved in any planning activity against the United States. That is an important fact that I think needs to be put onto the table.

Why did the Taliban want them back? Why did the United States want Bergdahl back? We did not want Sergeant Bergdahl back because of the critical role he was going to play in our military operations. We wanted him back because we bring our people

home. I suspect there was a similar motive with respect to the other side.

My understanding about this is the five detainees are detained at Guantanamo as prisoners of war because they were Taliban members, but not detained as enemy combatants because they had taken any steps against the United States.

My understanding—and I think this was part of our earlier conversations here—is that as prisoners of war, when the war is over, international law suggests that these individuals would have to be released. The President gave a speech at West Point in the last 2 weeks saying combat operations are finished in Afghanistan in 2014. Under international law, there is an argument that this particular agreement puts these individuals under restrictions for a longer period of time than they would be under a restriction because of international law.

So I have some concerns about the Bergdahl situation, largely about the notice to Congress. I think any White House that can plan a Rose Garden ceremony with the parents of Bergdahl could have called the heads of the Intelligence Committee to tell them what was going on. And I view that as not an oversight but as something, frankly, intentional. That chaps me a good deal.

But the notion that these five Taliban members are going to get back into a war against the United States when there is no credible evidence that they were ever engaged in activities against the United States is something that has to be considered in figuring this out.

And I do think, Mr. Chairman, we probably need to kind of get to the bottom of this, extending of the hearing that we had about the AUMF that you chaired. The testimony from the witnesses was what do you have that you might be worried about giving up if the AUMF expires. They said the continuing status of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the ability of the DOD to do counterterrorism operations, and the status of all Guantanamo detainees could potentially change with the AUMF. But given that the five detainees in this instance were not detained because of actions against the United States but only as prisoners of war because they were members of the Taliban, my understanding of international law is if combat operations are over in 2014, there is an international law argument that they would need to be released without restrictions. They may be under more severe restrictions because of this deal than they would have been otherwise.

We had a hearing in my subcommittee on April 30 about Afghanistan's transformation past 2014 focusing on some of the social factors, women in school, increases in life expectancy, a 20-year increase in life expectancy in the last decade. Twenty years times 30 million people is like 600 million years of extra human life. We talked about those things.

And there was a bit of evidence at that hearing that I thought was pretty staggering—or testimony, General Allen testifying. And he said that he thought for the Government of Afghanistan post 2014, the existential threat was not the Taliban but the existential threat was corruption. I wonder if either of you would offer an opinion upon that testimony that General Allen gave.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes. I guess it depends on the existential threat to whom. In terms of Afghanistan's development and to a functioning and increasingly prosperous country, I think corruption is a very substantial obstacle. It is interesting that that corruption and economic development have displaced security as the top concerns for most Afghans. And the election campaign demonstrated that what the candidates mostly talked about was how they were going to fight corruption and improve the economy, not how they were going to fight the Taliban.

Nevertheless, even though the Afghans remain very concerned about corruption, they also remain optimistic about their future, positive about their government, and generally confident in their institutions. So they can hold sort of two thoughts in their head at the same time. One is this corruption is really awful. The second thought is this is better than we have ever had it in our lifetime experience and that of our fathers. And so I think they have got both of those concepts down pretty strongly.

As I said I think earlier, it is hard to make a distinction between corruption and patronage in some cases. You have got a country which particularly back in 2002, 2003 had weak or nonexistent formal institutions, and it was a shared patronage system that held the country together and that is still the case to some degree. Now, that has to diminish over time. You are never going to do away with patronage entirely, but you do have to corral it, regulate it, limit it, and create a more level playing field for people. The structure of the international assistance programs have laid out a road map, if you will, for Afghanistan to make a number of reforms and a certain proportion of our assistance and assistance from other countries is contingent on some of those reforms being made over time.

Now, my experience even in highly developed countries like the United States is it is hard to make more than one reform at a time. We are still absorbing changes in our health care system. And we are asking Afghanistan to make reforms of comparable magnitude in terms of how it affects the lives of individuals and particularly how it affects the political system. We have got about 18 such changes we would like them to make all at once, which has not happened and is not going to happen. They are making slow progress. Both candidates have probably listed corruption, along with economic development, as their top priorities, and I think we will have to continue to encourage them to deliver on those.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Just one or two final questions. In 2014, the State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism report said that "Afghan, Taliban, and Haqqani Network leadership and facilitation networks continue to find safe haven in Pakistan, and Pakistani authorities did not take any significant military or law enforcement action against these groups."

Now, as I mentioned, Pakistan recently launched an operation into North Waziristan ostensibly to target elements of the Pakistani Taliban that have attacked the state. But I am really very skeptical that they will attack or target the Haqqani Network during the operation.

What is your current assessment of Pakistan's willingness to confront the Haqqani Network during the operation? Either one of you.

Ambassador DOBBINS. In the last few weeks, we have addressed this with the Pakistani leadership, making clear the priority we attach to addressing the challenge that the Haqqani Network represents to our forces and to our facilities and to our personnel in Afghanistan. We have been assured by Prime Minister Sharif, by General Raheel Sharif, by the Interior Minister Chaudhry, by the head of the ISI, General Zaheer, and today in a conversation with General Mahmoud, the chairman of their joint chiefs, that they are going to treat all militant groups similarly and that they are going to force all foreign militants out of northwest Waziristan and Pakistan.

I think your concern is justified. I think we will be examining this carefully. We have gotten the right assurances, but there is a historical pattern of activity, which I referred to in my written testimony and which I read to you, which indicates that there are habits here that are going to be difficult to break. And so I think we have made our position clear. They have said the right things.

The CHAIRMAN. That is a lot of assurances.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. But actions speak louder than words.

I think the Pakistanis look at the Haqqani Network much different than they look at the Pakistani Taliban in terms of their own interests. And I also think that for a variety of political, governing, and other reasons, they do not target this network. I hope that as we are considering what our continuing engagement with Pakistan is, that we are going to not only seek commitments, but we are going to judge accordingly how they act in terms of our assistance to them because I think this is incredibly important. And if you do not make it—if performance in this regard does not become a measurement, then I think all the assurances in the world will mean nothing.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I agree.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask you about the review that is going on with our policies toward the countries of Central Asia. If we are going to have sustainability in terms of the economic situation in Afghanistan, this is going to be pretty critical. And the progress that has been made on the CASA-1000 project, which will provide electricity from Central Asia to Afghanistan and Pakistan, is significant, but I am thinking about what obstacles there are to the completion of that. What is it going to mean in terms of being able to move forward on the new Silk Road project? I know they are not directly connected, but if you can achieve one, then maybe you can actually make progress.

Ambassador DOBBINS. What is the second one?

The CHAIRMAN. The new Silk Road project.

Define our interests as part of the Central Asian effort with Uzbekistan. I know you are dealing with Afghanistan and Pakistan, but these are interrelated from my perspective. To the extent that you can share some insights into that.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, the CASA-1000 or 5000 is moving forward. It has gotten international blessing. It is getting inter-

national support from the United States, from the international financial institutions. All of the necessary countries have bought into it in principle. The last I heard, which was a few weeks ago, was that there was still a pricing negotiation going on between Afghanistan and Pakistan, that is, how much Pakistan would pay Afghanistan for the electricity that was being transmitted over Afghanistan to Pakistan—so it is essentially a commercial negotiation, if you will—would still have to be resolved. And then, of course, the lines have to be built, and that will depend in part on the security situation, although with respect to that project, people seem more sanguine that it can be done within the current environment, whereas some of the other larger investments like a pipeline from Turkmenistan would probably require more significant improvements in the security situation before it became viable.

As to the new Silk Road, that is, of course, a complex of proposals and ideas rather than a single commercial venture like the CASA venture. And I think the Chinese have their own Silk Road vision, which they arrived at independently but which is largely compatible with our own. Central and South Asia is the least economically integrated region in the world. That is, the countries of this region trade less with each other than the countries of any region in the world. Pakistan, for instance—its largest market is in the United States, despite the fact that it is neighboring India and China. That is crazy obviously. And that is symptomatic of the region as a whole, although not to quite that same extreme degree. So breaking down those barriers to trade and creating commercial links, including infrastructure links, roads, electric grids, pipelines, but also just breaking down the barriers is what the new Silk Road concept is really about.

It is not heavily funded on the part of the United States. I mean, we are putting political energy, limited resources, and pushing it. China is going to be hosting a meeting in August on the Heart of Asia group which will address these issues to some degree, and there will be other regional issues.

The CHAIRMAN. So that is far off. The realization of this is years away.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I mean, you would have to go through it project by project. Some of them are easier than others. In terms of Uzbekistan, first of all, I think it is notable that among the targets that the Pakistanis are going after very vigorously now are Uzbek groups in Pakistan have been one of their prime targets in the recent military actions there.

Uzbekistan tends to prefer to work bilaterally rather than multilaterally. So they are kind of resistant to larger groupings like in the new Silk Road context. They tend to be a bit more resistant than some of the other countries of the region to working in anything except purely bilateral arrangements which can sometimes create a problem.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Magsamen, what is our security cooperation with Uzbekistan?

Ms. MAGSAMEN. Let me comment more generally on Central Asia and I will get to Uzbekistan.

A stable and secure and independent Central Asia is definitely in our interests, and as you know, the Central Asian states have

been critical during this period in Afghanistan, especially on the NDN network for us. We have in place a series of security cooperation efforts underway with pretty much all of the Central Asian states focused on border security, counternarcotics, countering extremism, and also helping them build up their defense institutions, so working through defense reform efforts. We have a number of tools at our disposal going forward in terms of FMF and IMET and DOD counternarcotics funds, DOD 1206 funding, and we intend to use them going forward. I think the next couple of years, the Central Asian states are going to be increasingly looking to us on the security front, and I think it will be important for us to respond accordingly to their concerns.

In terms of cooperation in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan—you know, they are very concerned as well about the potential for terrorism groups to spread into Central Asia, as you know, and in particular the IMU, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, is an area of increasing concern for them. And that group has been focused largely in Afghanistan, but they are watching that closely to see whether it moves into Central Asia.

But we are focused going forward mainly on the border security piece and the CT cooperation with many of these countries.

The CHAIRMAN. Particularly in Uzbekistan, is this about border security and counterterrorism?

Ms. MAGSAMEN. I would have to get you the specific answers on the breakdown of the security cooperation.

The CHAIRMAN. If you would, because I am concerned about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan and recently wrote to President Karimov on behalf of five political prisoners, which I would like to include in the record, the letter that we sent to him for this hearing, which I know Senator Durbin has also been really concerned about, a member of the committee as well.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information requested and the letter referred to above were not made available at the time this hearing went to press.]

The CHAIRMAN. So I would like to know exactly what we are doing with the Uzbeks, so I can judge on that.

Ms. MAGSAMEN. We will follow up with a full answer. The CHAIRMAN. Fine. Thank you.

And finally, Ambassador, today Dr. Abdullah has called for a halt to the vote counting citing allegations of widespread fraud. Now, I heard your comments before. We are going to go through a difficult period of time. But what is our role in moving through this potentially contentious period in terms of having an improving dialogue between the two campaigns and through this process?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, we are urging that both sides remain engaged with the electoral institutions, and we regret any moves to the contrary. So we are talking to both of the candidates regularly. We are encouraging them to talk to each other, which does not seem to be happening as frequently as it should either directly or via intermediaries. We are certainly talking to the electoral institutions. The international community has observers who observe the vote count, as the two candidates are permitted to do, as it goes forward. And we are in regular contact with President

Karzai who, as I have said, so far has been playing a responsible role in trying to keep the candidates in the game.

Our basic view is that the electoral institutions have to be supported. They have to be given a chance to do their job, that there certainly was fraud. There were significant levels of fraud in the first round and almost certainly in the second round. There are mechanisms for challenging and dealing with this fraud, and these mechanisms have to be given a chance to work.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief.

First of all, thank you for being here today and thank you for what you do. Mr. Ambassador, I get the strong sense that you pursued a different policy relative to laying out the timelines. You do not have to answer that. I would just say that while I hope that we are able to have the kind of success in Afghanistan that will warrant that type of withdrawal—I do hope, as you continue on, if you see things on the ground that show that that type of withdrawal, arbitrary and precipitous, will have a damaging effect, that you will urge strongly that the administration consider a different course of action. I think you will. I think you have done that in private sessions with us. Again, I know many others at the State Department, for instance, on Syria and other places have wished that we would take a different course of action, and I know the White House has overruled. But I hope you will continue on the path that I think you have been on.

And secondly, I would just ask the question in closing. The chairman and I are sitting down with the Joint Chief from Pakistan that you referred to earlier at 5 o'clock. I think most of us have felt both the intelligence agency and the military have been double dealing with us, and I think it is pretty much public record that that is the case. I know they are here to convince us that something is different now, and they are going to strongly go into North Waziristan.

I would just ask. I know the Prime Minister has urged that not to occur and has urged us to pursue policies that would allow them to have some kind of an agreement with the Taliban and other terrorists in that region. Is the Prime Minister firmly supportive of what the military is doing? I know in their country, many Americans do not realize that the military and the civilian piece are very separate, but is the Prime Minister strongly supportive of that activity?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes. First of all, I think the Prime Minister's view and the civilian government's view was that they had to give the elements of the TTP a chance to climb down to disarm and to respect the constitution and operate within it. And they engaged in negotiations with that objective, and they did that without any objection from us. I do not think there were great expectations that that would succeed, but I think their feeling was that that was a necessary step both because they could peel some elements of the insurgency off as a result and, secondly, because they needed to go into a massive operation of this sort, which is going to produce a lot of refugees, a lot of costs, a lot of damage to innocent people, as well as to the guilty, on the basis of a strong national consensus.

They now have a strong national consensus. The Prime Minister has authorized and directed this particular action. While I think the military may have had different views throughout this period, they have saluted and done what they have been told. So when they were told not to take action, they did not. When they were authorized to take action, they are now taking the action.

So while you are right that historically there has been a strong distinction between civilian and military leadership and while this has not gone entirely away, the two are a lot closer and civilian authority over the military is gradually being demonstrated. And we assume this will be a gradual process.

I have told you about the assurances we have received with respect to the Haqqani Network. If you are going to be having meetings, I think you need to not only hear those assurances but make clear that you are going to evaluate your own attitudes based on the degree to which you believe those assurances are fulfilled.

Senator CORKER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I wanted to briefly address this issue—two things. Senator Kaine a moment ago pointed out that none of these five—there are any links that any of these five had ever been involved in direct attacks against the United States. But in fact, it is much more complex than that. The 9/11 Commission, for example, found that the hijackings in the United States on September 11 of 2001 were a culmination of a three-step plan that al-Qaeda had.

The first part, of course, was the assassination of the Northern Alliance commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud.

The second was the following day on September 10, al-Qaeda and the Taliban took their second step. It was a delayed Taliban offensive against the Northern Alliance, which was apparently coordinated to begin as soon as that first step took place. They wanted to weaken the opponents of the Taliban because they knew there would be retribution for the 9/11 attacks. And the 9/11 Commission found that Fazl, one of the five people that have been released, was the one who was one of bin Laden's chief lieutenants in this operation who helped carry this out.

By the way, of the five that have been released, two are wanted for U.N. war crimes. So I think that this notion that somehow these individuals have never directly plotted against the United States—you could probably say that about every member of al-Qaeda for the most part. They were not directly in the room plotting the 9/11 attacks, but they certainly were key facilitators of providing a safe haven for al-Qaeda to carry these things out. And as the 9/11 Commission found out, at least one of them was a key operative in this three-step plan leading up to 9/11.

The second statement that has been made here today is that the war is over and that when wars end, this is normal to exchange prisoners. And in fact, we may have no legal basis to hold them.

But I am curious. Earlier today you said to us—and it happens to be the absolute fact—that the Taliban has not gotten that memo. For example, as you stated, the Taliban is not holding back. They are still shooting at Americans. They are still planting IEDs. They are still trying to kill Americans.

Can I ask? Do you anticipate that in 2016 when we are down to only an Embassy presence, will the Taliban still pose a mortal threat to Americans in Afghanistan irrespective of the number of people we have there? Will they will be shooting at Americans?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Okay. Let me try to answer this in some order.

First of all, none of those five are wanted for U.N. war crimes. None. They may have committed war crimes, but the United Nations is not seeking them. If by the United Nations, you presumably mean the International Criminal Court. I do not believe the International Criminal Court—

Senator RUBIO. They have all been linked by United Nations groups with, for example, the slaughter of Shiites.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I am not sure what “linked by United Nations groups” means in that case. There are human rights advocates, including human rights elements of the United Nations, that have indicated that they may be associated with those crimes. That is absolutely right. That is different from saying—

Senator RUBIO. So are you confident that none of these individuals have committed human rights violations?

Ambassador DOBBINS. No, of course not. Quite the contrary.

Senator RUBIO. You think they have.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think there are credible allegations. I think that is all you can say at this stage. But, yes, the allegations seem credible. They are still allegations, but they are credible. But there is no judicial process. They have not been indicted. Afghanistan is not seeking them. The ICC is not seeking them. So it is not as if they are evading some warrant that is out. Okay? So they are not wanted.

Senator RUBIO. They have been named in allegations before U.N. tribunals. They have been named—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Just one of them, maybe two. I mean, your information may be correct. But there have been credible allegations about linkages to large-scale atrocities that probably could be qualified as war crimes.

Senator RUBIO. What about Fazl’s involvement in the three-step plan leading up to 9/11? Now, the 9/11 Commission—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Let me get to that.

Now, this is something you probably really need somebody from the intelligence community. My impression is that we do not believe that anybody in the Taliban, including Mullah Omar, were witting to the 9/11 attack. They did not know about it. They were not told about it. Now, I could be wrong. So that is something the—that is my impression that we do not believe that there was collaboration in planning that specific attack and that they were not aware that it was going to take place. So the idea that there was a three-step plan in which the Taliban were witting to all three steps or part of it—I am not sure that our intelligence analysis would validate that.

Senator RUBIO. Would you agree that the first two steps were coordinated with al-Qaeda? The Northern Alliance offensive leading up to 9/11. Let us assume for a moment, for the sake of argument, that the Taliban was not told that on 9/11 there is going to be an

attack. They certainly coordinated with al-Qaeda to carry out both the suicide attack and the offensive on the 10th. Right?

Ambassador DOBBINS. The Taliban carried out the offensive. So, obviously, they were witting to it. They were the principal instrument of it. I do not know whether they were witting to the attack on Massoud. It is quite plausible, but I do not know.

And then you had a third point.

Senator RUBIO. The points about the Taliban and the—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Oh, yes. Are they going to continue to present a threat? Quite likely, just as there are other countries in the world in which we have large embassies in which we are under threat. And in those cases, within our own perimeter, we provide for our own security. Outside the perimeter, we depend on the local forces. And our current estimate is that by 2017, Afghan forces will be capable of holding the Taliban at bay and continuing to secure the large population centers, including Kabul.

Senator RUBIO. But I guess the bigger point that I was trying to—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Will the Taliban still be targeting us? Yes.

Senator RUBIO. I guess my bigger point is traditionally when you talk about the end of a war, what you are talking about is both sides stop shooting at each other. My point is we may stop shooting at them, but they are still going to be trying to kill us.

And I think the bigger point is, when you talk about these exchanges at the end of a war, Sergeant Bergdahl is returning to his family. By your own testimony here today, all five of these may be potentially, quite possibly returning to the Taliban to the same group that still targets us.

So I do not think it is fair to say that the war is over. Certainly we may feel that way or some of our policymakers may feel that way. I do not think the Taliban feels that way.

Ambassador DOBBINS. What the President has said is that United States combat operations are going to cease in Afghanistan at the end of the year. But, obviously, there is going to continue to be a war in Afghanistan, and we are going to be continuing to support—

Senator RUBIO. Again, I only raised that because the statement was made that at the end of wars, it is normal—

Ambassador DOBBINS. Fair enough.

Senator RUBIO. My argument is the people you are releasing them to do not believe the war is over. In fact, as long as any American is present there, they will be in danger of being attacked by them.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you to both for your testimony and your service.

Ambassador Dobbins, I must say, while I may not always agree, your depth and scope of knowledge here is an extraordinary asset to our country, and I appreciate the particular commitment you have, having come back to service in this regard. So thank you very much.

Thank you both for that.

The hearing record will remain open until the end of the day on Friday.

And with that, this hearing is adjourned.
 [Whereupon, at 4:05 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSE OF AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS TO QUESTION
 SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Ambassador Dobbins stated that the U.S. “New Silk Road” initiative is largely compatible with China’s “Silk Road Economic Belt” initiative. Please outline the compatibilities between the two initiatives and the potential for U.S.-China coordination and cooperation on economic development in Central Asia.

Answer. Through the New Silk Road initiative, the United States supports energy, trade, transport, people-to-people, and other linkages that expand regional economic cooperation and development between Central and South Asia. Given both the challenges of building connectivity in one of the least integrated regions in the world and specific U.S. interests in the region’s development, we view working with other partners and countries, including China, as a means to enhance stability, security, and prosperity in the region.

China is one of Central Asia’s largest trading partners, and Chinese objectives in the region include developing a Eurasian Trade Corridor that facilitates land transit of goods from China to Europe. China has also focused on infrastructure projects, including pipelines to bring natural gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to China. Through its “Silk Road Economic Belt,” China has prioritized infrastructure links between Central Asia and China. Chinese support for Central Asian road and rail infrastructure has led to decreased transit time and costs for exports. There are a number of other initiatives underway in the region, including the Asian Development Bank’s Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program, that also advance the prospects for increased trade and economic investment across borders.

Chinese efforts to develop primarily east-west links can complement some of our efforts to develop north-south trade routes linking Central Asia and South Asia. The United States engages with China on the region and regional economic connectivity through bilateral consultations, mutual support of CAREC activities, and as part of the “Heart of Asia” Istanbul Process under which a number of cross-border economic initiatives have been promoted. In fact, China is hosting a Senior Officials Meeting of the Heart of Asia process in July and a Ministerial in August. The Heart of Asia promotes an integrated region, with a particular focus on addressing security and economic issues related to Afghanistan. In both CAREC and the Heart of Asia process, we see the opportunity for further discussions and potential cooperation with China. Where we have shared interests, and can promote open trade and transparent investment and business climates, we will seek to do so, in cooperation with all of the countries of the region.

RESPONSES OF KELLY E. MAGSAMEN TO QUESTIONS
 SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Question. The United Nations reported that 121 civilian casualties were attributed to the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in 2013. The report also included documented cases of torture by the ALP. How will the U.S. work to prevent human rights abuses by the ALP and the broader Afghan National Security Forces after 2016? How will you work with the new Office of Security and Human Rights in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the State Department to ensure compliance with the Leahy Law?

Answer. The Department of Defense (DOD) is committed to deterring human rights violations by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and promoting accountability within the Afghan Government. An ANSF that operates effectively and with respect for human rights is central to the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. This respect for human rights is integral to the ANSF’s ability to provide for Afghanistan’s security, to retain public support, and to continue to receive international community backing for ANSF development programs.

In helping build the ANSF, the United States has assisted Afghanistan in implementing an eight-step vetting process for new recruits to the ANSF, which includes identification requirements; background, medical, and drug screening; input from

village elders or guarantors; and biometric enrollment. This effort has helped to reduce the number of high-risk recruits accepted into the ANSF. Additionally, the United States has assisted the ANSF to develop training programs on human rights and law of war standards for each new recruit. This includes emphasis on the critical responsibility of each member of the ANSF to conduct their duties in a professional manner, and in alignment with international norms. As the U.S. presence in Afghanistan declines over time, we will encourage the ANSF to maintain focus on these programs.

DOD has also worked closely with the Department of State to develop implementation guidance for the new DOD Leahy law, which is being finalized now. We continue to work with State on vetting procedures and remediation standards to ensure compliance with the DOD Leahy law in Afghanistan.

Finally, DOD recognizes that sustained engagement is central to emphasizing the importance of human rights. As such, respect for human rights continues to be a key theme of DOD and U.S. Forces—Afghanistan (USFOR-A) efforts in their engagements with Afghan counterparts.

TIMELINE TO ENHANCE ANSF CAPABILITIES

Question. Please provide a timeline of the U.S. plan to enhance the ANSF's capabilities by the end of 2016 to operate independently of U.S. armed forces, particularly with regard to close air support, logistics, and medical evacuation.

Answer. The capability gaps we expect to remain after the International Security Assistance Force mission ends on December 31, 2014, include air support (e.g., MEDEVAC and CAS), intelligence, special operations, and security ministry capacity (including logistics). U.S. and coalition partners remain committed to training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) after 2014 as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission, provided the necessary legal frameworks are in place. The main focus of the Resolute Support mission will be on closing these capability gaps.

The A-29 "Super Tucano" will provide the ANSF with a limited CAS capability. Afghan pilots and maintainers are scheduled to begin training on the A-29 in the United States in February 2015. Initial deliveries of A-29s to Afghanistan will begin in early 2016, with full operational capability occurring in 2018. DOD is also assessing other options to further close the CAS gap.

Development of the Afghan logistics system, including maintaining the \$13 billion in equipment that has been provided using the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), is one of our highest priorities. ASFF-funded cases are being implemented that will provide sustainment support for major end items. These efforts extend to the development and improvement of institutional logistics and maintenance training capabilities of the Afghan National Army and Police. U.S. support and technical assistance for the development of the Afghan logistics system will be a focus of our future efforts.

MEDEVAC is currently provided by the Mi-17 helicopter fleet. Restrictions on DOD's access to Russian industry for parts and engineering services would severely degrade this fleet and undermine ANSF MEDEVAC/casualty evacuation capabilities.

SECURITY COOPERATION WITH UZBEKISTAN

Question. Please describe U.S. security cooperation with Uzbekistan. How will it change based on the troop drawdown from Afghanistan? I remain very concerned about human rights in Uzbekistan and recently wrote to President Karimov on behalf of five political prisoners. Please tell me how the Defense Department specifically engages with the Uzbek Government on human rights.

Answer. Uzbekistan has been an important partner for the United States as an integral participant in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), which has been an important route for supplies to our Forces in Afghanistan. During the surge and during the nearly year-long closure of Pakistan cargo routes, NDN routes through Uzbekistan were essential to sustaining U.S. military forces in Afghanistan. To a lesser extent, the NDN is being used for retrograde of materiel out of Afghanistan. This cooperation with Uzbekistan will continue beyond the end of 2014, as the Department of Defense intends to maintain multiple, redundant supply lines to Afghanistan for as long as the United States has Forces in Afghanistan or is providing support to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

As a participant in the NDN, Uzbekistan faces an increased risk from extremist forces. U.S. security and military assistance to Uzbekistan (e.g., Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), and counternarcotics-related assistance) is intended to help strengthen Uzbekistan's capa-

bility to maintain its border security and to build the capacity of Uzbek security forces to deter and defend against potential extremist threats.

As you know, the Department of Defense is committed to upholding the intent and the letter of the DOD Leahy law and understands the value of robust human rights vetting. Recipients of DOD-funded assistance are vetted under the DOD Leahy law. Observance of human rights is included in all training and assistance programs, and Defense officials routinely discuss respect for human rights in high-level dialogues with Uzbekistan counterparts.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. How many of the five Taliban commanders released in the prisoner swap for SGT Bergdahl have been accused of committing war crimes?

Answer. None of the five Taliban members transferred to Qatar have been the subject of arrest warrants by an international tribunal. According to human rights organizations, at least one of the Taliban members may be implicated in atrocities that occurred before 9/11, but such reports do not necessarily provide a legal basis for detention.

Question. Were these individuals' records of committing atrocities against innocent Afghans considered when their release was being reviewed?

Answer. These reports of atrocities against innocent Afghans occurring before the September 11, 2001, attacks were not the legal basis under which the five Taliban detainees transferred to Qatar were captured and subsequently held at Guantanamo Bay. The administration implemented a rigorous process that reviewed each of the five Taliban detainees who were transferred, including any information about the detainees' military experience in Afghanistan's civil wars. There were no illusions about these five detainees, who were mid- to senior level officials in the Taliban regime and party to violence against other Afghans. However, the five detainees have not been directly connected to any U.S. deaths.

Question. Was an assessment done of the likelihood that these individuals, if they return to the battlefield, as administration officials have admitted is possible, would commit further war crimes against innocent noncombatants?

Answer. Four of the five were assessed as likely to rejoin the Taliban in some way. However, we have no reliable indications that any of the detainees intend to commit war crimes against noncombatants if they rejoin the Taliban. We are of course concerned whenever the Taliban, or any other group, attack innocent civilians.

Question. Is it standard practice for the United States to release individuals accused by multiple human rights groups and international organizations of "widespread atrocities?"

Answer. The five detainees transferred to Qatar were captured and subsequently detained at Guantanamo Bay under the Law of War and not on the basis of accusations by human rights groups or international organizations. Pursuant to Executive Order 13492, the administration implemented a rigorous interagency process that reviewed each Guantanamo Bay detainee on a case-by-case basis in order to determine the proper disposition of each—transfer, prosecution, or continued detention pursuant to the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). With respect to the detainees transferred to Qatar, each was approved for continued detention pursuant to the AUMF, and none was referred for potential prosecution.