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PAGE 01 KABUL 03572 01 OF 03 061155Z

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SECTION 01 OF 03 Kabul 3572

Classified By: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Madame Secretary,  
As we near the end of our deliberations on the way forward in Afghanistan, I would like to outline my reservations about a counterinsurgency strategy that relies on a large infusion of U.S. forces. I fully agree that the security situation in Afghanistan is serious and that additional troops will help reverse the worsening trends in areas where the troops are deployed. There is an unassailable logic to the argument that a robust counterinsurgency approach will yield measurable progress, at least in the security realm.  
But I am concerned that we underestimate the risks of this expansion of our mission and that we have not fully studied every alternative. The proposed troop increase will bring vastly increased costs and an indefinite, large-scale U.S. military role in Afghanistan, generating the need for yet-more civilians. An increased U.S. and foreign role in security and governance will increase Afghan dependency, at least in the near-term, and it will deepen the military involvement in a mission that most agree cannot be won solely by military means. Further, it will run counter to our strategic purposes of Afghanizing and civilianizing government functions here.  
Perhaps the charts we have all seen showing the U.S. presence

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rising and then dropping off in coming years in a bell curve will prove accurate. It is more likely, however, that these forecasts are imprecise and optimistic. In that case, sending additional forces will delay the day when Afghans will take over, and make it difficult, if not impossible, to bring our people home on a reasonable timetable. Moreover, none of these charts displays dollar costs. Acknowledgement of the astronomical costs might illustrate the greater desirability of civilian alternatives now dismissed as too costly or not feasible.

Here are my reasons for this assessment:

1. President Karzai is not an adequate strategic partner. The proposed counterinsurgency strategy assumes an Afghan political leadership that is both able to take responsibility and to exert sovereignty in the furtherance of our goal ) a secure, peaceful, minimally self-sufficient Afghanistan hardened against transnational terrorist groups. Yet Karzai continues to shun responsibility for any sovereign burden, whether defense, governance or development. He and much of his circle do not want the U.S. to leave and are only too happy to see us invest further. They assume we covet their territory for a never-ending war on terror and for military bases to use against surrounding powers.

-- With his re-election, Karzai will remain Afghanistan's dominant political actor. We hope we can move him toward taking firm control of his country and guiding its future. But sending more combat forces will only strengthen his misconceptions about why we are here. Before any troop announcement, we should first have a high-level dialogue with Karzai and his new government to explain our goals and obtain agreement on what we expect from them. Even with such an understanding, it strains credulity to expect Karzai to change fundamentally this late in his life and in our relationship.

-- Beyond Karzai himself, there is no political ruling class that provides an overarching national identity that transcends local affiliations and provides reliable partnership. Even if we could eradicate pervasive corruption, the country has few indigenous sources of revenue, few means to distribute services to its citizens, and most important, little to no political will or capacity to carry out basic tasks of governance. As a practical matter, this means that expanding assistance, either military or civilian, will increase Afghan dependence and make more remote the day when we can transfer most sovereign responsibilities to the Afghans and draw down our presence.

2. We overestimate the ability of Afghan security forces to take over. Success of the proposed counterinsurgency strategy hinges upon Afghan forces steadily assuming responsibility for security and fully taking over this duty by 2013. Yet achieving that goal will require President Karzai to embrace his role as commander-in-chief, a step he resists, and for him to commit his government to recruiting and training. I have serious doubts about the Afghan government's ability to meet the ambitious targets and timelines necessary to meet our requirements. The Army's high attrition and low recruitment rates for Pashtuns in the south are crippling. Simply keeping the force at current levels requires tens of thousands of new recruits every year to replace attrition losses and battlefield casualties; those requirements would steepen dramatically under the proposed strategy. Building an effective Afghan National Police, which is in many ways more crucial to extend the Afghan government's reach into villages and districts, will prove even tougher. The Police receive lower benefits and face higher risks in many places than the Army.

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-- Given the exorbitant political and fiscal costs of large-scale U.S. deployments, we should consider increasing the financial incentives for joining the ANA and ANP. If our assumption is that more forces are essential to stabilize Afghanistan, then we should investigate the benefits to security of making service in the Afghan security forces more attractive, rather than relying more heavily on foreign troops.

-- There is also the deeper concern about dependency. The proposed counterinsurgency strategy calls for partnering in the field to quickly improve the Afghan security forces. I do not question the ability of U.S. forces to effectively take on this mentoring mission, one that they have performed ably in Iraq. However, I am concerned that it is U.S. and other NATO-ISAF troops that will continue to do most of the fighting and take most of the casualties. Rather than reducing Afghan dependence, sending more troops, therefore, is likely to deepen it, at least in the short term. That would further delay our goal of shifting the combat burden to the Afghans.

3. We underestimate how long it will take to restore or establish civilian government. The proposed strategy assumes that once the clearing and holding process has been accomplished in a given area, the rebuilding and transferring to Afghans can proceed apace, followed by a relatively rapid U.S. withdrawal. In reality, the process of restoring Afghan government is likely to be slow and uneven, no matter how many U.S. and other foreign civilian experts are involved. Many areas need not just security but health care, education, justice, infrastructure, and almost every other basic government function. Many have never had these services at all. Establishing them requires trained and honest Afghan officials to replace our own personnel. That cadre of Afghan civilians does not now exist and would take years to build.

-- At the moment it is mostly U.S. civilians and those of our allies who follow behind our forces into cleared areas to establish formal governance. We are not trying to build on a Western model, but as we assume this responsibility in an ever-widening area, it becomes harder to leave until the Afghans can provide basic services themselves. We have little clarity about how long it will be until cleared districts are connected to an Afghan government that both functions in Kabul and reaches down to the local level.

4. The proposed strategy does not remedy an inadequate civilian structure. There is no civilian organizational counterpart to ISAF and no political leadership equivalent to the NATO-ISAF commander, a deficiency that hampers civilian effectiveness and heavily skews the NATO-ISAF dialogue with the Afghan government. UNAMA is not capable of coordinating all the civilian efforts, because its role is not to serve as the civilian policy and program counterpart to NATO-ISAF. Its capabilities and will are likely to diminish further with the recent post-attack withdrawal of U.N. personnel. Progress on governance, anti-corruption, rule of law, and reconstruction will ultimately determine our success, but our coalition efforts will remain less than optimum unless a stronger civilian structure is created.

-- No one questions the military's need for coherent command and control. Yet the same attention has not been paid to the civilian configuration, even though we are engaged in a long-term operation in which one of the central premises is a fully-integrated civilian-military effort. There is no debate that the U.S. is in the military lead. We need to reach the same understanding with our allies and partners on the civilian side, especially if more troops are sent. NATO should designate the U.S. as the &Lead Nations for those civilian tasks delineated in its operational plan. Arguments that this will increase the U.S. role are beside the point. Right now the U.S. leads the civilian dialogue by default. But the ambiguity in the Afghan government, s eyes over the



status of the U.S. versus the ISAF commander opens a seam that Karzai is quick to exploit. Unless we create a civilian authority comparable to the military chain of command, this problem will deepen and we are likely to see further militarization of our effort, instead of civilianizations and Afghanization, which are our real aims.

5. The proposed strategy may not be cost-effective. Sending additional combat brigades will require tens of billions of dollars annually for years to come, costs not detailed in DOD charts. Yet an Embassy request this summer for a \$2.5 billion increase in our budget for development and governance was analyzed and debated in great detail, only to be rejected. If more troops are sent to Afghanistan, we should revisit decisions about our development funding.

-- In particular, we should weigh whether a relatively small additional investment in programs for development and

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SECTION 03 OF 03 Kabul 3572

governance would yield results that, if not as visible as those from sending more troops, would move us closer to achieving our goals at far lesser cost and risk, both in lives and dollars. Accelerating our work on signature projects to deliver greater access to electricity, water, and education could have a high payoff in stability over the long term. With a greatly stepped-up development effort we could be in a position at some point to call off further troop deployments, as Afghans began to see their lives improving and their needs addressed.

6. More troops won't end the insurgency as long as Pakistan sanctuaries remain. Pakistan will remain the single greatest source of Afghan instability so long as the border sanctuaries remain, and Pakistan views its strategic interests as best served by a weak neighbor. There is reason to be encouraged by Pakistan's current military offensive in Waziristan, but the lasting result of this effort is still unclear. Nor does the Pakistan military action address the role of the Quetta Shura, which has the most influence over the insurgency in southern Taliban strongholds, or the Haqqani network, the most lethal killer of allied troops and Afghan civilians. Until this sanctuary problem is fully addressed, the gains from sending additional forces may be fleeting.

-- We are always looking for game-changers. If we are looking for a strategic partner and military or political moves likely to have decisive results, those might be in Pakistan. As we contemplate greatly expanding our presence in Afghanistan, the better answer to our difficulties could well be to further ratchet up our engagement with Pakistan.

This memorandum summarizes my concerns about the counterinsurgency strategy now under consideration and my thoughts about other steps to achieve our goals. After our discussion at the SVTS Principal's Committee this evening, I will follow up with a cable that will include specific recommendations. For now, I cannot support DOD's recommendation for an immediate Presidential decision to deploy another 40,000 troops here.

Madame Secretary, I would ask that you pass this assessment to the White House, if you deem it appropriate, in advance of the Principal's Committee.

Respectfully,  
EIKENBERRY

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