

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT M. GATES
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2010

Mr. Chairman, Senator Cochran, members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity this afternoon to discuss the Defense Department's portion of the Fiscal Year 2010 supplemental request.

I am honored to appear with the Secretary of State. Our joint testimony today reflects the close cooperation of our two departments, and the importance of a properly funded and integrated civil-military approach to the challenges we face in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world. At the outset, I would like to offer my strong support for the important programs funded in the State portion of the supplemental request, without which our military efforts will not be successful.

While this hearing is focused on the specifics of the FY 2010 request, this occasion also represents an opportunity to discuss broader national budget priorities. These times of economic and fiscal stress place enormous pressure on all of us to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars – including the agencies represented here today. That is why President Obama and I – in last year's and this year's budget – made tough decisions about major programs that were either performing poorly or in excess to real world needs. However, even at a time of budget pressures, I believe it is critical to sustain an adequate, sustainable level of investment in the instruments of national power – be it defense, diplomacy, or development – that are so essential to America's security and position in the world.

As you know, I recently returned from a visit to Afghanistan. There, I had a chance to talk to our military commanders, Afghanistan's leaders, and our troops serving at the tip of the spear in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. Overall, I believe there are grounds for guarded

optimism as our campaign to roll back the Taliban gains momentum, and as the Afghan government shows an increasing willingness to take on additional responsibilities. Nonetheless, there will be many tough and long days ahead. And it may take several months to produce visible results, as most of the additional forces ordered by the President have not yet arrived in theater and begun operations.

I would also caution against an overly ambitious view of what true stability and security will look like in a place that has known nothing but war for three decades. For most Afghans, a roof over their heads, an opportunity for their children to attend school, and the ability to provide for the basic needs of their families free from violence would be considered a very good life. The scale of the international coalition's efforts and ambitions should reflect that basic reality.

The FY 2010 supplemental request totals \$33 billion, almost all of which is to support operations in Afghanistan and the additional 30,000 troops being deployed as part of the President's strategy announced in December. We remain on schedule to see overall U.S. troop levels reach 98,000 by the end of the fiscal year.

The request includes \$1.1 billion – on top of the \$11.3 billion already enacted – to field and sustain lifesaving MRAPs and M-ATVs for troops already in theater and for the additional forces being deployed.

Finally, this supplemental contains \$2.6 billion to strengthen the Afghan National Security Forces. The goal of the President's strategy and our supporting military efforts is to create conditions that will allow for a full transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan government. Earlier this month, I visited the Combined Fielding Center at Camp Blackhorse and had a chance to speak with Afghan troops undergoing training. I told them that Afghanistan is their country, and ultimately their fight to win. I know that many of you have concerns about the

Afghan security forces. I share those concerns – as do our military commanders. The Afghan army has taken real strides over the last year and many troops have shed blood for their country. Increased Afghan involvement in operations is critical to success, as is being demonstrated in Marjah. Significant work remains to be done with the police force, but there, too, changes are underway that will, I believe, yield progress in the near term. As you consider this request, I would emphasize that successfully accomplishing the training mission represents both our exit strategy and the key to long-term stability in Afghanistan.

The supplemental request also includes \$1 billion to strengthen Iraqi security forces. These additional resources – which will be used to strengthen Iraqi institutions such as the Ministry of Defense – are needed this year to ensure that the Iraqis are fully prepared to assume internal security responsibilities. This is a critical period in Iraq as government forms and as we consolidate security gains.

In Haiti, as the President requested, the Department is providing continuing support in the wake of January's earthquake. Due to the urgent need for an immediate response, the Department used funds from existing accounts, with the understanding that these accounts would be replenished in a supplemental. As such, the \$655 million is part of an amendment for Haiti that was recently submitted to Congress and includes funding to cover these costs.

All of these operations are fuel intensive. Due to rising prices, our fuel cost this year has been greater than anticipated. Included in this request is \$2 billion to partially offset the resulting shortfall in the Department's base and OCO operating accounts and ensure uninterrupted operations.

I should note that this Department has moved most funding for programs not directly related to the war into the base budget. The budget request being discussed today is a true

supplemental as they were originally intended, for the purposes of funding immediate and unforeseen requirements – in this case, primarily the troop surge associated with the president’s new strategy for Afghanistan. I urge approval of this request by the spring to prevent costly and counterproductive disruptions to the Department’s operations.

Before closing, I’d like to say a few words about the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), which continues to be a powerful tool for military commanders in carrying out counterinsurgency operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. General Petraeus has called it his “most important authority,” and I would urge the Congress to fully fund the CERP programs contained in the Department’s budget requests.

Having said that, I understand there is some concern on this committee about the way CERP has been used in recent years. The Department is currently performing an internal assessment of existing processes, which includes consideration of a single departmental coordinator, additional dedicated CERP managers and contracting personnel in theater, and increased pre-mobilization and in-country training. Nonetheless, even with improved execution and oversight, it is unrealistic to expect a tool like CERP – whose very effectiveness is tied to its flexibility and the discretion granted to local commanders in a war zone – to attain a zero-defect standard.

In conclusion, thank you for your support of the men and women of the U.S. military – extraordinary Americans who have fought our nation’s wars, responded to natural disasters, and protected our interests around the world. I know their health, safety, and welfare will be your top priority in making these difficult decisions in the weeks ahead. Thank you.