



U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

**Chairman Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing
“NATO: Enlargement and Effectiveness”
March 11, 2008
Opening Remarks**

Assistant Secretary Fried and General Craddock, welcome and thank you both for being here today.

Next month, the twenty-six member-states of the NATO alliance will gather in Bucharest, Romania. Central to their discussions will be the question of bringing Ukraine and Georgia *closer* to the alliance... and Croatia, Macedonia and Albania *into* the alliance.

The other major issue is the effectiveness of NATO in its first “out-of-area” military commitment – the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

Summits have a tendency to force events: a time for actual decisions on hard issues. So it’s no surprise that in the run-up to this summit, disagreements among allies sometimes get the spotlight. Even so, I am deeply concerned that, on the eve of this summit, the alliance is especially fractured and incoherent.

First, there appears to be a total lack of clarity on how to respond to the applications of Ukraine and Georgia for Membership Action Plans, or “MAP”.

I believe, and speaking for myself only, we should encourage Ukraine and Georgia by granting their requests for MAPs. Both countries have made substantial progress towards consolidating the gains of the Orange and Rose revolutions -- and they already have made substantive contributions to NATO operations.

A Membership Action Plan is not an irrevocable step for either the applicant state or for the alliance. The decision on an invitation to join the alliance can take as long as NATO wants or the applicant state requires.

Second, there is no apparent consensus on the three countries who are candidates for actual membership.

During the 1990s, NATO became a force for the promotion of a Europe whole and free in ways its founders, I don't think, ever fully imagined.

The prospect of membership encouraged Europe's newly liberated countries to settle long standing disputes, to deep root democracy and human rights and, of course, to build competent militaries.

I am proud that, here in the Senate, I helped lead the effort to enlarge NATO, along with Senator Lugar. It remains my conviction that we should extend an offer of NATO membership to any country that applies and meets the criteria.

As a strategic matter, the admission of Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia to NATO would bring the Balkans closer to the European future its people deserve... and strengthen, in my view, regional security.

That does not mean these three candidates must enter the alliance as a bloc. Each country should be judged against the established criteria, on its own merits.

Of course, NATO's current members must all agree on the decision to invite new ones. I have strongly urged Greece and Macedonia to find a reasonable compromise to the "name" dispute that stands as a bar to Macedonia's membership. If they are unable to do so in time for the summit, that failure should not, in my view, penalize the prospects of Croatia or Albania.

I expect our witnesses to address the readiness of these three candidate countries to join NATO. Our second panel includes two prominent experts who disagree on whether these countries are ready – and it is important, I think, to hear this debate here in the Foreign Relations Committee.

Finally, the other critical issue at this summit is Afghanistan – the forgotten war.

I was there just a few weeks ago with Senators Kerry and Hagel. Each of us has spoken to our deep concern that while Afghanistan remains winnable, we are not winning. In my view, we need a new strategy for success and a new NATO commitment.

This should not be America's fight alone. Our allies joined this war from the start. This was not a war of choice; it was a war of necessity. And our allies have as much at stake as we do.

Since 9/11, Europe has been repeatedly targeted for terror and virtually every attack can be traced back to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions.

The heroin Afghanistan produces winds up in the streets of Madrid and Berlin – not New York. In fact, since 2001, far more Brits have lost their lives to Afghan drugs than to Taliban arms.

Many of our NATO allies thought they were signing up for a peacekeeping mission, not a counter-insurgency operation. Many are fighting with incredible bravery in the south.

But the so-called “national caveats” are making a mockery of NATO – and the notion of a unified mission.

One ally can fight here – but not there.

Another can do this – but not that.

You’re either in the fight – or you’re not. It is time for NATO to be fully in the fight. I believe that the future of NATO is at stake – in Afghanistan.

The NATO summit must bring this issue to a head. We are right to expect more from our allies and from NATO. But they are also right to expect more from us.

When I first went to Afghanistan right after the Taliban fell in January of 2002, I asked the commander of British forces how long his people would allow him to stay in Afghanistan. He told me, “We Brits have an expression. As long as the big dog is in the pen, the small dogs will stay. When the big dog leaves, the small dogs leave as well.”

Well, guess what? The big dog left in 2002 when we diverted so much of our attention and so many of our resources to Iraq. There wasn’t a lot left for Afghanistan. Instead of finishing a war of necessity, we started a war of choice.

My colleagues and I have met with countless generals and commanders since 2001. And they all say something to the effect of - ‘We didn’t do too much, or enough, from 2001-2006.’ It is time for this war to get the attention it deserves.

I commend Secretary of Defense Gates, who acknowledged last month ago that Europeans tend to project the hostility they feel for the war in Iraq onto the fight in Afghanistan. The war in Iraq is misrepresenting the war in Afghanistan. I think this represents a fundamental misreading of facts, and we have done a poor job of distinguishing the case for one war from the other. I’m glad Secretary Gates has dedicated himself to correcting the record

We always say that a summit is “critical.” But I think this one really is – it’s critical to the construction of Europe, to the war in Afghanistan and to the future of the alliance itself.

I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses and from my colleague, Senator Lugar.

###