

Dick Lugar

U.S. Senator for Indiana

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Opening Statement for Hearing on Afghanistan

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Republican leader Dick Lugar made the following statement at today's hearing:

Since President Obama's inauguration, his Administration has taken a series of steps to reorder American foreign policy priorities. The President identified the war in Afghanistan as his administration's highest combat priority and has thus shifted emphasis and resources from Iraq to Afghanistan and Operation Enduring Freedom. He argued that the United States effort in Afghanistan had been neglected in favor of our intervention in Iraq. President Obama made an important effort to sustain continuity of command and control of our defense department at the highest levels by retaining an effective and respected Secretary of Defense and promoting General Petraeus from Commander of U.S. forces in Iraq to Commander of Central Command, where he leads our military efforts across the region. Both men have identified civil-military coordination as essential for progress toward U.S. goals in the region.

At a more operational level, President Obama named Ambassador Richard Holbrooke as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He leads our strategic engagement with the governments of the region while our able Ambassadors, Ann Patterson in Pakistan, and Karl Eikenberry in Afghanistan, work tirelessly in carrying out their respective duties. The U.S. diplomatic effort is joined in cause by Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Beyond his responsibility for assuring the fitness and readiness of our fighting forces worldwide, he is closely engaged in the delicate and essential security discussion across South Asia. In his many visits to Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan Admiral Mullen has worked to forge a closer, more confident relationship between our government and each of theirs. These leaders are seized of our commitment to Afghanistan and Pakistan and strengthening the foundations for stability. They, along with Secretary of State Clinton, National Security Advisor James Jones and Vice President Biden, are together in the final stages of a crucial review of our strategies and policies in the region.

But the President is the commander in chief and he is the one who will make the final choices from the options he is presented. It is widely hoped that he will produce a coherent operational strategy for U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Such an integrated strategy has yet to be unveiled despite the many high- and low-level reviews, and none has been described by the President with the force and conviction necessary to persuade the American people to endorse what will likely be a much longer, albeit necessary, commitment to achieve stability in the region. As he formulates his new strategy, I strongly urge the President to make a concerted effort to work personally with the Congress, which will control the purse strings for our endeavors in the region.

We in Congress have heard of general outlines of an approach to the region highlighted by the President and his senior advisors in March of this year, namely, that we intend to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat" al Qaeda and their allies. We have also received extensive requests and notifications, through several Supplemental Appropriations and the fiscal year 2010 budget requests, identifying billions of dollars in assistance and operations funding for Afghanistan and the region. But many questions have arisen surrounding troop levels, civilian force levels, and contractor roles and behavior. Considering the important role of development for the region, I am troubled that there is still no USAID administrator. As a Member of both this Committee and the Agriculture Committee, I am concerned about reports that \$170 million in USAID money will be transferred to the Department of Agriculture to develop an expeditionary agricultural development capacity for Afghanistan. This, I believe, is normally the job of USAID.

For the moment, the Committee has been informed that Gen. McChrystal's suggestions for future strategy and tactics are being studied in the Administration. We are led to believe that after the administration has studied the McChrystal report for an indefinite period of time, the General may suggest appropriate troop levels for the United States and our NATO allies necessary to achieve the administration's final decision on objectives.

The Committee hearings this week offered the administration an opportunity to explain the challenges and difficult decisions to be made after nearly a year of study. Invitations were issued, but they were declined. Thus we have turned today to key actors and former officials experienced in government, war zones, Afghanistan, and the region, to provide their insight and recommendations. We are grateful that they have accepted our invitation to present timely information to our committee and to all Americans in an extensively covered public forum. I hope that the Administration will soon decide on the time for its views to reach the American people. In any event, it is critical that the full force and voice of the President lead the discussion around this national strategic priority with so many American lives and hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars at stake. Only he can lay the foundation that will gain the confidence of Congress and of our soldiers, development experts, diplomats, and partners.

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