

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Afghanistan
January 31, 2008

I join the Chairman in welcoming our two very distinguished panels. All of our witnesses are good friends of the Committee who have appeared before us multiple times. We are especially grateful that they have come today to share their conclusions and insights on a subject of critical importance to U.S. national security.

The ongoing international effort to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan must succeed. There should be no doubt that Afghanistan is a crucial test for NATO. The September 11 attacks were planned in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda still operates there, and the fate of the country remains both strategic and symbolic.

Afghanistan has experienced a 22 percent decrease in infant mortality since the Taliban were in power. In 2001 only 8 percent of Afghans had ready access to health services. Today, almost two-thirds of Afghans enjoy this benefit. Since the fall of the Taliban, nearly one thousand miles of main and secondary roads have been rehabilitated. This has contributed to a growing economy, which realized a 13 percent increase in GDP in 2007. School attendance has increased five-fold since 2002, with 5 million Afghan children attending schools and 60 million textbooks delivered.

Thus far, the United States has invested nearly \$5 billion in the reconstruction effort. The rest of the international community has invested even more. Yet, while these investments have yielded demonstrable gains, the overall situation in Afghanistan remains grave. Democratic institutions are fragile and the government does not control significant regions of the country. A massive drug trade funds the Taliban, which despite setbacks, seems to be able to regenerate its ranks. These circumstances demand a resolute commitment by NATO countries and other coalition partners to help establish security and advance the causes of reconstruction, democracy, and rule of law in Afghanistan. For its part, Afghanistan must be committed to building a sufficient army, raising an adequate budget, and maintaining control of its own territory. NATO can only be a transitional force.

At the end of the Cold War, a debate ensued over the durability and purposes of the NATO alliance. After much debate, the stability of Europe was greatly enhanced by the addition of new NATO members. This discussion flared again in the shadow of the Balkan conflicts. Each situation appears to have reinforced the value of the NATO alliance. Yet, the debate over the efficacy of the alliance continues as the NATO-led ISAF has encountered the limits of coordinated action among its members. There is a troubling shortfall of political commitment that is hampering the ongoing operation in Afghanistan.

The time when NATO could limit its missions to the defense of continental Europe is far in the past. With the end of the Cold War, the gravest threats to Europe and North America originate from other regions of the world. This requires Europeans and North Americans to be bolder in remaking our alliances, forging new structures, and changing our thinking. To be fully relevant to the security and well being of the people of its member nations, NATO must think and act globally.

I am pleased to hear that the Bush Administration is reviewing its current approach in Afghanistan, and I look forward to hearing more about that today. The decision to send 3,000 additional Marines to Afghanistan should indicate to partners that the U.S. is committed and willing to dedicate the necessary forces to combat the insurgency. We also stand with the Canadian, British, and Dutch forces that are calling for more support from partners.

I believe strongly that NATO is capable of meeting the challenge in Afghanistan. NATO commanders have demonstrated that they understand the complexity of the mission. They know that success in Afghanistan depends on the attitudes of the people, the progress of reconstruction, and the development of the economy, as much as it depends on battlefield successes. But NATO commanders must have the resources to provide security, and they must have the flexibility to use troops to meet Afghanistan's most critical security needs.

I thank the Chairman for holding this hearing and look forward to excellent discussions with our witnesses.

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