

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
Voices of Veterans of the Afghan War
April 23, 2009

I join the Chairman in welcoming to the Foreign Relations Committee members of the Armed Services who have served their country in combat. As President Obama launches a new initiative in Afghanistan and the Congress prepares to consider his requests for funding operations in the region, it is important that we hear from many different perspectives about the way forward. I have benefitted enormously from talking to many Hoosiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, both in the regular military and as members of the National Guard and Reserves. Since September 11, 2001, 13,000 Hoosier National Guard personnel have been deployed in defense of our country. Currently, more than 100 Guardsmen from Indiana are mobilized in Afghanistan, and some 20 Hoosiers have lost their lives in that conflict.

President Obama has elevated the priority of the Afghanistan mission. The September 11 attacks were planned in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda still operates there, and the fate of the country remains both strategic and symbolic.

As the Obama Administration devotes more resources and troops to Afghanistan, however, many details need to be fleshed out. Eyewitness accounts of battlefield conditions may be valuable in evaluating the Administration's plans. Equally important are insights about the views and capabilities of the Afghan people, who ultimately will have to rebuild their country and provide for its political stability.

I think Americans across the political spectrum are agreed that the situation in Afghanistan cannot be solved by military means alone. Multiple reviews of our policy have concluded that up to 80 percent of activities necessary in post-conflict and counter-insurgency situations are civilian tasks. Success in Afghanistan may depend on the attitudes of the people, the progress of reconstruction, and the development of the economy, as much as it depends on battlefield victories. In the end, sustainable peace and progress is dependent upon Afghan determination to achieve a cohesive society.

I look forward to hearing from our honored witnesses.

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