

Genevieve Chase is a volunteer veteran spokesperson for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and is working to establish American Women Veterans as a non-profit veterans support organization for women veterans.

Chase enlisted in the US Army Reserve in 2003 and, following training, volunteered for three years of active duty during which time she deployed as a sergeant to Afghanistan with the Army's 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry.) She worked primarily as an intelligence soldier and devoted some of her time to studying and learning about the Afghan culture and Pashtun language.

On April 7, 2006, while returning from a routine meeting with local government officials, Chase's vehicle was attacked by an IED carried in a suicide vehicle. All five passengers survived the attack with minor external injuries but suffered varying degrees of traumatic brain injury and PTSD. Chase received a Purple Heart.

Chase was born at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and grew up in the Army. She is the author of an online blog and does occasional work as a media consultant on the portrayal of women in the military.

She is currently a staff sergeant in the Army reserve, waiting to attend Warrant Officer Candidate School. She is also pursuing a bachelor's degree in intelligence and terrorism studies, and works as a defense contractor. Chase resides in Alexandria, Virginia.

**U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Testimony of Genevieve Chase,  
Veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom  
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Senator Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you my testimony. My name is Genevieve Chase and I served with the U.S.

Army in Afghanistan during Combined Joint Task Force - 76, Operation Enduring Freedom, 2006. I deployed as a member of a Military Intelligence team and was trained in the Pashto Language. Forty weeks of Pashto language training was not merely about learning the language but involved gaining an understanding of the history, culture and the people of Afghanistan. Our teacher made it very clear to us what his hopes and goals were for his students; namely that we would utilize our knowledge and skills for the good of the Afghan people. He believed in the mission that we had set out to accomplish in Afghanistan and he hoped for a peace in his former homeland. He not only taught us language and history, he provided a window into the heart of one Afghan man. Afghans remember their history well and have not forgotten that we left their country without any foundation in which to rebuild their devastated land following the defeat of the Soviet Army. When I had the unique opportunity to speak with the Afghans in their language, they were grave in telling me that we, the Americans, would do it again.

I had great hopes when I left for Afghanistan, some of which were entrusted to me by my Afghan teacher. Of these was the possibility that one day I would see the children of Afghanistan live without knowing suffering, fear and death. What I saw, heard and felt when I got there was a palpable desperation of a people living in abject poverty and indescribable fear. I returned home with memories that will haunt my dreams for a lifetime and with the harsh and sobering realization that to the Afghan people and their children, my nightmares are their daily reality. It is because of my unwavering hope for the Afghan people that I feel compelled to ask some very important questions of the leaders in my country, questions that were asked of me, an American Soldier, by the Afghans with which I had the honor to serve with.

If we say that we are there to help the Afghans and we want them to believe us, why do we not truly listen to them? Afghan culture is by far one of the most complex that I have ever been exposed to. Understanding it requires more than a forty-five minute briefing from

someone who may have read about it. Even a forty-week, full-time language course taught by a native Afghan is not going to give one a comprehensive understanding of what it means to work among and with Afghans, especially when considering the vast differences in tribal cultures. In my opinion, this is one area in which I believe that we have wavered in our commitment to the Afghans and to the future of their country. In so doing, we have also failed every American and Coalition soldier that has given his/her life in Operation Enduring Freedom. By not honoring the Afghan culture and acknowledging their history, we have not only failed in laying the foundations for a secure and stable environment but we have failed in building sustainable economic growth, both ideal end-states necessary so that we may bring all of our troops home. In nearly eight years of this conflict, we have failed to fully assess and evaluate the culture of the Afghans which will prevent us from winning this conflict.

It is not too difficult to ascertain why, despite our intentions and efforts, that some Afghans continue to believe that we are an "occupying force." We went boldly into their country, planned and carried out our operations and then retreated to the safety of our fortified and guarded compounds before sundown. The very basics of all human needs, according to unadulterated common sense and supported by the theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, consists of the physiological needs that all humans must fulfill in order to survive; Food, water, and shelter. On the next level exists the need for security and community, a sense of *safety*. A society cannot flourish without those basic foundations with which to build structural supports that encourage the growth of a stable and viable economy. Along with our Coalition partners, we threw billions of dollars at Civil Affairs and reconstruction projects that we thought would win their "hearts and minds" while we empowered, supported and protected a government in which many local Afghans believed contained nepotistic officials and corrupt provincial governments. With the help of these same embezzling officials we supported and continue to support the eradication of their rival tribe's poppies while failing to provide alternative crops to the poorest farmers.

We forced the farmers and "drug lords" to align with the Taliban and Al Qaeda in order to protect their livelihoods while we surge in and out of volatile areas. We have continued in making promises, asking and sometimes demanding cooperation only to leave those that would assist us to the fate of death by the hands of the enemy for the very act of agreeing to work with us.

The best of the Afghan village elders and leaders have three choices;

1. Voice and defend the interests of their constituents but face beheading or worse,
2. Flee their homes and country in order to live and protect their families,

Or,

3. Play to the interests of whomever is in their town at the moment hoping to play both sides and not be killed by either?

I am not speculating about what may occur in Afghanistan, these assessments are based on my first-hand observations and those of my comrades. I will never forget speaking to a respected village elder, one of the few we trusted in the remote area of Helmand Province, who felt that there was nothing more he could do to save his people but make the dangerous trip from the mountains under fear of Taliban reprisal, to appeal to the Americans and ask for assistance in pushing the Taliban out from his village. However, he left our Provincial Reconstruction Team defeated and without hope.

How do we create this stability that will allow for legitimate elders and leaders to govern without fear? The answer to this question lies in yet another, "What have we done wrong and what lessons have we learned from our mistakes?" Just as Lieutenant Backsight Forethought, in the classic military text - "The Defense of Duffer's Drift" had seven dreams in which he was able to analyze each tactical battle, we have had eight

years in which to do the same. Currently, we not only rotate out units but Divisions and brigades. In Vietnam, we rotated in smaller replacement troops which at least gave a bit more continuity to the battlefield. Unfortunately, due to the strains on our forces, we piecemeal units that have not trained together and have little to no operational experience in the Afghan theater but most significantly, in a culture where a man's trust and respect is earned with time, loyalty and a devotion to the cause, we rotate out units every six to twelve months. We ask our Afghan comrades and leaders to place the same trust in perfect strangers, that we spend priceless time earning. With each rotation, just as Lt. Forethought did with his reoccurring dreams, we have had to start from the beginning to build and cultivate those working relationships again.

In addition, we put ourselves at a serious disadvantage when we send trained Pashto, Dari and Farsi linguists to units going to Arabic speaking Iraq or put them into non-deploying units in Germany or Korea. These are our linguistic experts - - they should deploy to their respective theaters. Likewise, we often send troops with two previous tours in one area of operations in which they are "subject matter experts" to work in areas of the world with which they are unfamiliar, and thus we lose not only their mentorship and training for junior soldiers, but their relevant and pertinent knowledge of the enemy.

The question is not whether an influx of troops will be effective or be seen as an "occupation" but how do we effectively utilize those additional troops. The way in which we do so will cultivate how the Afghans perceive our intentions. Adding another seventeen thousand boots on the ground or even doubling that number has the potential to be as one fellow comrade put it, "like applying a band-aid to a sucking chest wound." It is not how many more troops we add, but how we *utilize* those troops effectively. Afghanistan's population of over 33 million is dispersed throughout the country with concentrated areas in which International Security Assistance Forces and Coalition troops hold large bases. In the more remote areas, we have established small

Forward Operating Bases and even smaller Provincial Reconstruction Team compounds and Fire Bases. Although the concept of the PRTs was altruistic, their application has been hindered by a number of issues, all secondary to the lack of security. What good sense does it make to build schools, provincial centers, bridges and wells when there is no support or security provided for villagers to utilize them?

My first recommendations are that we push our troops out to an even more local level. Rather than Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), we establish, at the minimum, District Security and Reconstruction Teams (DSRT) within and among the villages, working in conjunction with the village elders. These DSRTs would provide a safe haven for the people rather than the enemy and in turn, Afghans would maximize the information operations campaigns through the development of progressive and prosperous communities. In order to do this, we start as we did in 2001, supporting the Afghans with small, strategic victories and from there spread out while maintaining our ground and assisting the Afghans in providing their own security by living and serving alongside them.

Secondly, we allow individual troops and units to extend their tours if requested so that we may apply expertise and continuity to rotating troops. At the very least, we rotate out cohesive Divisions and Brigades within not only the same theater, but the same area of operations. Furthermore, we cultivate our own organic assets to include our linguists, analysts and soldiers with Afghanistan, asymmetric and/or counterinsurgency experience and engage them in a focused and concentrated force armed not just with weapons and ammunition, but the power of knowledge, experience and wisdom.

Third, we support the Afghans in rooting out corruption and establishing secure and stable environments for which they can regain the pride they have for their country rather than supporting corrupt officials as they work their own agendas and line their own pockets. We should encourage our Coalition partners to purchase poppy yields giving the

money directly to the farmers rather than to corrupt district and government officials, while providing alternative crops to grow and safe markets in which to facilitate commerce.

These are not all of the answers but merely an evaluation of how we can leverage our assets, experiences and capabilities in the theater. These thoughts are just the beginning of what must be a multi-faceted and enduring effort on the behalf of all involved. As I stated previously, Afghanistan's diversity in culture and geography demand that we embrace a comprehensive and intimate understanding of the nation's issues. Broad and generalized tactics as we have applied in the past will not work in every corner of Afghanistan. Cultivating our "homegrown experts" by allowing them to provide continuity and confluence of operations through their learned knowledge and moreover in depth network of interpersonal relationships are tantamount to mutual trust, respect and eventual success. In addition, keeping subject matter experts and experienced commanders within the same area of operations while applying a flexible methodology will allow for a more tailored and applicable mission. Just as the enemy has adapted to our tactics, we must get away from the "Big Army" mentality and do the same. In time and within an environment in which schools will not be burned or bridges blown up, the Afghans will have safe access to employment and education. When this happens, we will begin to see the possibilities of a country free from radical and rampant extremism where adults will be able to provide for their children and their children will be free to attend schools. One day, this generation of children in Afghanistan will be better prepared to take the reigns of their country from their parents and will grow with the *memory* of war rather than the daily reality of it and they will carry within themselves the hope for enduring prosperity and peace for the future of Afghanistan.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify here before the Committee today and look forward to your questions.