

Testimony of Ryan C. Crocker  
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Hearing on Afghanistan  
September 17, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, Members of the Committee, thank you for the honor of appearing before you today. Afghanistan is a critical issue for America's national security. Eight years ago this week, we paid a horrific price for allowing a strategic enemy the freedom to operate in Afghanistan. We are engaged against the same enemy today in the same area. That enemy is hoping that our patience will wear thin, that we will decide the cost is too high, that we will give them back the space they lost after 9/11. Mr. Chairman, that must not happen.

Al-Qa'ida and its Taliban supporters are a threat not to the United States alone but to the region and the entire international community, as the sad record of their terrorist attacks makes all too clear. It is a threat that requires an international and a regional response. General Craddock is addressing the NATO perspective. On the basis of my experience as Ambassador to Pakistan from 2004 to 2007 and my involvement in discussions with the Iranians on Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003, I offer a few thoughts on the regional environment.

Mr. Chairman, our relationship with Pakistan is vital for our own national security and for stability in Afghanistan. We understood this clearly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Our efforts against the Soviet occupation were largely staged from Pakistan. But once the Soviets were out, so were we and Pakistan went almost overnight from our most allied of allies to a sanctioned pariah. After 9/11, we were back and major military and economic assistance programs were resumed. Pakistanis welcome our reengagement. They also wonder how long we will be around this time. We need a long term, stable relationship with Pakistan, one in which both nations and peoples can have confidence . Such a relationship can only be built up over time, overcoming past suspicions and mistrust on both sides.

Mr. Chairman, you, Senator Lugar and this Committee have shown us all the way forward through your sponsorship of the Enhanced Relationship with Pakistan Act. This is precisely the type of long term undertaking we both so badly need.

Mr. Chairman, Pakistan today faces a triple set of interrelated insurgencies: Kashmiri militants to the east; the Taliban, its supporters and the al-Qa'ida

terrorists it shelters to the west; and an internal militancy that strikes at the heart of Pakistan's principal cities. Some of this militancy is of Pakistan's own making. In the Pakistani narrative, some of it, like Pakistani support for the Taliban in the 1990's, grew from a lack of other options based on our estrangement. The history of that estrangement, and fear of its repetition, drives some in Pakistan to continue to hedge their bets.

Mr. Chairman, during my time in Pakistan I came to know a large number of mainstream politicians and senior military officers. None of them share the Taliban's vision for Afghanistan or Pakistan. Yet many remain uncertain over the long term prospects for our relationship. We need to learn from our past experience and build for a better future. Your legislation, Mr. Chairman, charts the course.

Afghanistan's western neighbor, Iran, presents a very different set of challenges. The multiple and profound differences between the United States and the Islamic Republic need no elaboration from me. On Afghanistan, however, we have at times found room for cooperation. The Taliban in Afghanistan was an enemy to

both of us – Iran almost went to war with the Taliban-led Afghan government in 1999. In the wake of 9/11, I found Iranian negotiators fully supportive of U.S. military action to bring down the Taliban. U.S.-Iranian agreement on the Afghan Interim Authority was at the core of the success of the U.N.-sponsored Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in December 2001. And after I reopened our Embassy in Kabul in January 2002, we discussed with the Iranians ways to strengthen the Interim Administration, to reduce the power of the warlords, the handover of al-Qa'ida operatives, and even coordination of assistance projects. But the Iranians hedged their bets, also providing sanctuary and support for al-Qa'ida terrorists who were later linked to lethal attacks in the Arabian peninsula, actions that effectively ended our 18 month dialogue.

Mr. Chairman, the Obama Administration has stated its willingness to engage in talks with the Iranians. The Iranians have signaled a positive response. I support this initiative, and believe it offers an opportunity to reengage with Iran on Afghanistan. Iranian support for the Taliban, its existential enemy, is purely tactical, a weapon in their confrontation with us. A renewed dialogue on

Afghanistan could afford Tehran the opportunity to think strategically on an issue of great importance to its own long term national security.

Mr. Chairman, I am no expert on Russia or Central Asia. But these states, too, play an important role in Afghanistan. The previous and current Administrations have worked to foster trade and communication links between Afghanistan and the former Soviet Republics. It is important these efforts continue, and it is important that Afghanistan continue to be a part of our dialogue with Russia. We have no desire to repeat the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. Neither is there anything in our current effort in Afghanistan that is inimical to Russian interests. To the contrary, the defeat of an Islamic militancy close to Russia's borders should be very much in Moscow's interests.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I offer a few thoughts based on my experience in Iraq from 2007 to 2009. One must be very careful in attempting to draw connections. They are very different countries with different histories. Iraq is largely urban, Afghanistan predominantly rural. In many respects, the challenge in Afghanistan is even greater than in Iraq. Thirty years of conflict have devastated an already

poor country, leaving few services, virtually no middle class and no functioning state institutions. But hard does not mean hopeless, neither in Afghanistan nor in Iraq. Where I do see similarities is in how the U.S. approaches the challenges. We cannot get to the end in either fight on half a tank of gas. In Iraq, we went all in, and it made a difference. The President must lead. We have our finest people in the fight – General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry in Afghanistan, Ambassador Patterson in Pakistan. General Petraeus, my comrade in Baghdad, now oversees both wars and there is simply no one in uniform more qualified to do so. Under their charge are the thousands of committed Americans, military and civilian who are putting their lives on the line. But it is the President who must make the commitment and show the way. When he does, I hope that this Committee and counterparts in the Senate and the House will seek from my former colleague that irreplaceable perspective, the view from the field.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for the privilege of testifying on this critical issue. The American people have consistently shown a willingness to make great sacrifices when they understand the stakes and have confidence in their

leadership. The stakes are very high indeed in Afghanistan, and all of us are indebted to you and the Committee for illuminating the issues.