



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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Hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations “Afghanistan: Plan to Turn the Tide?”

419 Dirksen Senate Building, 31 January 2008, 9:30 AM

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on the current situation in Afghanistan, aiming to assess the legitimacy of the upcoming elections. The hearing featured two panels: the first panel’s witnesses were **Ambassador Richard A. Boucher**, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State and **Ambassador David T. Johnson**, Assistant Secretary, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Department of State; the second panel’s witnesses were comprised of **General James L. Jones, Jr.**, USMC (Ret.), Former Commander, European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, **Thomas Pickering**, Former Under Secretary for Political Affairs, U.S. Department of State, and **Ambassador Richard Holbrooke**, Former U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Chairman Joseph R. Biden (D-DE), in his opening remarks, quoted Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff **Admiral Michael Mullen**: in Iraq “**the United States does what it must, while in Afghanistan, the United States does what it can.**” After emphasizing that the U.S. has not achieved success in Afghanistan because the Administration hasn’t made it a priority, Chairman Biden stated that to achieve such success, the U.S. has to establish security, “get moving on reconstruction,” and do counter-narcotics right.

Ranking Minority Leader Senator Richard G. Lugar (R-IN) noted in his opening remarks that while the United States has invested nearly \$5 billion in the reconstruction effort, “democratic institutions are fragile and the government does not control significant regions of the country.” He believes strongly that NATO is capable of meeting the challenges in Afghanistan.

In Panel I, **Ambassador Boucher** told the committee “**Afghanistan offers a rare opportunity to win a close, loyal, democratic ally in the heart of a continent with unmatched political and economic capital and potential.**” In addition to mentioning security, governance, counternarcotics, and reconstruction, Boucher noted that the U.S.’s “**support for democratic stability and human rights in Afghanistan is also paying off.**”

Ambassador Johnson noted in his remarks that “it is **now clear that Afghanistan’s narcotics industry feeds a troubling cycle of insecurity wherein drug money fuels insecurity by assisting the insurgency, undercuts international reconstruction efforts, and hinders the development of the legitimate economy.**”

In Panel II, **General Jones** stated that the U.S. can be successful in Afghanistan, but the lack of international momentum on narcotics is a problem. Of the many reforms needed, he believes that “**judicial reform is imminently possible.**”

Thomas Pickering began his remarks by urging that “Afghanistan is at a critical crossroads [and that] **six years of progress is under serious threat from resurgent violence, weakening international resolve, mounting regional challenges and a growing lack of confidence on the part of the Afghan people.**” In his overarching recommendations, Pickering stated that the U.S. should: **create a group among allies and partners to put together a long-term coherent strategy, “decouple legislative and executive branch consideration of Iraq and Afghanistan,” and develop a unified management structure to lead all aspects of U.S. policy and implementation.**

Ambassador Richard Holbrooke stated the U.S. “will be in Afghanistan longer than Iraq is over.” Stating that it is imperative for the U.S. to succeed, he highlighted **three key problems: the border, drugs, and the police.**

In Panel I questions, **Senator Richard G. Lugar** asked Ambassador Boucher what the Administration’s overall plan is in Afghanistan, to which Boucher responded that the London Conference in 2007 outlines achievement goals that need to be turned into implementation.

Senator John Kerry (D-MA) highlighted the fact that in comparison to 2002-2005 where there was a total of 5 suicide bombings, there were 77 suicide bombings in Afghanistan in the past six months alone. With this mind, he questioned the Panel I witnesses as to how we can expect progress when “**conditions are worse now than they were before?**” Boucher reiterated his claims that “**the war will be won by delivering good governance and education, etc at the local and provincial levels.**”

In Panel II questions, **Chairman Biden** asked, “**How much of the ability to deal with the burden is how Afghanistan deals with Pakistan and with al-Qaeda?** Where should the focus be?” In response, Ambassador Holbrooke stated that we “**need an all-out effort between the Afghani and the Pakistani government** to decide on the border.” He also noted that **Iran must be part of the solution in Afghanistan.** He highlighted a new element to the situation in Afghanistan, the **rise of “the Pakistani Taliban** who are moving eastward and a lack of democracy is feeding their opportunity.” Pickering agreed that Iran and the U.S. have a shared interest in Afghanistan.