



**Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
From Coalition to ISAF in Afghanistan
September 21, 2006**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman, before us today is an issue, and I quote: “at the very heart of our war on terror: the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan. If current trends continue, we may soon find that our hard-won success on the battlefield has melted away...Unless we take a serious look at our policy, I greatly fear we may be setting the stage for a tragic replay of recent Afghan history.”

Mr. Chairman, I didn't write these words last night, in preparation for this hearing. I spoke them more than four years ago, on the floor of the United States Senate [May 17, 2002].

I'm not bringing up old quotes to say, “I told you so” but to demonstrate a very simple point: the current failure of Administration policy in Afghanistan is not a surprise. It's not an unforeseen circumstance that just crept up on us.

Ten days ago, Secretary Rice said that the Taliban “came back somewhat more organized and somewhat more capable than we would have expected.”

But we did expect it. Lieutenant General Maples, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, had predicted exactly such an outcome, in open Congressional testimony back in March.

Here's where we are today in Afghanistan:

- Osama bin Laden remains at large. His videotaped messages continue to inspire new recruits. Given the chance to kill him at Tora Bora, the administration instead pulled most of our Special Forces, CIA teams and Predators and sent them to Iraq.

- The Taliban is back and is keeping much of Afghanistan ungovernable. Suicide bombings, IEDs and other techniques imported from Iraq have made this year the bloodiest since their ouster. The Taliban are attacking from safe havens in Pakistan. They can do that because the government of Pakistan turns a blind eye to the Taliban high command based in Quetta, and just this month signed a “separate peace” with pro-Taliban militias in Waziristan.

This is no surprise. Many of us have been warning for years that if we didn’t bring security to Afghanistan, Musharraf would cut his own deal.

- Reconstruction is stuck in first gear. We didn’t put the money in. The failure to build security has put the brakes on many of the projects we did fund.
- The drug trade is out of control. This year’s opium supply is 30 percent larger than the entire world’s demand. The proceeds prop up the Taliban, war lords and corrupt officials. There is no serious counter-narcotics program.

These conditions are the result of five years of systematic refusal to commit the resources necessary to achieve victory. Now, instead of treating Afghanistan’s security as a vital national interest, we’ve handed the battle against the Taliban off to NATO — without making sure NATO has the troops, equipment and other military assets necessary to accomplish its mission.

We’re not doomed to failure. We can still turn things around. For starters, we could give NATO the troops — operating under the unrestricted rules of engagement — necessary for the task. We could give LTG Jones the helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, UAVs, satellite tasking, and other support he needs to crush the Taliban threat rather than playing whack-a-mole.

It’s not a whole lot that NATO is requesting: a few thousand more troops — so long as they’re battle-ready, and freed of the bureaucratic restrictions imposed by so many NATO members. Eighteen attack helicopters, three C-130 transport aircraft. I understand that yesterday Romania stepped up with a significant troop pledge, but I look forward to LTG Jones’ assessment of whether NATO truly has all the assets necessary to bring security to Afghanistan.

Second, we’ve got to drastically ramp up development aid—every military officer I’ve spoken to has noted that this battle won’t be won by force alone. As General Eikenberry has eloquently put it: “wherever the road ends, that’s where the Taliban starts.” President Bush promised a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan, but he’s delivered less development aid over the four years for which we have records than he spends on war costs in Iraq every four or five weeks.

The Afghan people are tremendously patient-- but they've gone half a decade without seeing a reconstruction plan worthy of a superpower. The longer they wait, the easier it will be for the Taliban to slide right back in.

I'll end, Mr. Chairman, with another quote:

“Afghanistan was not an ‘optional’ war. We didn’t choose to fight—we had to fight.

“We had to fight because the Taliban had turned the country into haven for terrorists—the terrorists who launched their barbaric attacks... And now, after flushing the terrorists from their lairs, we are sitting back and watching as Afghanistan once again deteriorates into the very condition that nurtured this malignancy...

“If we spend a tiny fraction of this money on Afghanistan’s recovery—if we provide adequate funding for reconstruction efforts and for expanded peacekeeping operations—we can help safeguard our own national security.

“You get what you pay for.”

I wrote those words three years ago. And it is evidence of a terrible failure of policy that they are even more relevant today.

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