

**House Armed Services Committee  
Hearing on Iraq and Afghanistan**

**Admiral Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Testimony**

**10 September 2008**

Chairman Skelton, Representative Hunter, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today and thanks as well for all you do to support our men and women in uniform.

Having visited with our troops all over the world, I can tell you they are aware and appreciative of America's support ... support which, in so many ways, emanates from this committee and from the Congress as a whole.

So, again, on their behalf, I thank you for that.

Let me begin today by also expressing my appreciation to the President and to Secretary Gates for their support of our Armed Forces and of the family members of those who serve.

Today, on the eve of the seventh anniversary of the 9-11 attacks, we are reminded again of just how critical that service really is, and, consequently -- in an All-Volunteer Force, where people have other choices -- how absolutely vital is the recognition and support of the federal government for the needs of our service men and women.

On that note, I stand particularly grateful today for the President's support of the recommendations Secretary Gates and I have made to him with respect to the way forward in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I need not recount for you here the details of those recommendations, nor the circumstances that underpin them. Secretary Gates has just done that very well, and I am in complete agreement with his views.

Today, rather, I wish to make the following points:

First, the recommendations that went forward to the Secretary and to the President represented a consensus view of military leadership in this country.

The process by which they were derived was candid, transparent and thoroughly collaborative. The entire chains of command for both Iraq and Afghanistan were involved and engaged, including the Joint Chiefs.

We did not all enjoy complete agreement early on. Frankly, I would have been surprised had it been otherwise.

One sees war -- feels it, fights it, leads it -- from one's unique perspective.

The key to success over the long term is proving able to see it also from another's perspective -- be it the enemy's or the public's or the chain of command -- and being informed by that knowledge as you move forward.

I can assure you, that all of us at all levels in the chain considered the whole of each struggle, the totality of each effort, and the need to preserve on a global scale our greater national interests.

Some in the media have described our final recommendations as a "compromise solution," and to the degree that this explains the process we employed I would agree. But it would be wrong to conclude that our proposal represented a compromise in ANY way of our commitment to success. We did not compromise one war for the other.

And that, Mr. Chairman, brings me to my second point: Iraq and Afghanistan are two different fights.

Many of you have been to both countries. You know these differences -- the enemy's various objectives; the political and economic challenges unique to each culture; the weather; even the ground. As one soldier in Bagram told me, in Afghanistan, the terrain itself is an enemy.

We treated the needs of each war separately -- and weighed our decisions for each solely -- against the risks inherent and the resources available.

Given the extraordinary success Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus have achieved in Iraq -- the dramatically improved security on the ground; the growing competence of the Iraqi military and police forces; the growing confidence of Iraqi political leaders, and the economic progress which is burgeoning -- it is our view that the risks of drawing down by one brigade and one marine battalion is minimal at best, and can be mitigated by the readiness of coalition forces already in theater -- or back home -- should a contingency arise to warrant their employment.

The rewards, on the other hand, are potentially great as we seek to build dwell time for our troops and their families and have at our disposal a rested, stronger, more capable strategic reserve for worldwide crises. As always, conditions on the ground matter most, and we reserve the right to recommend adjustments to these plans should those conditions require it.

Conditions in Afghanistan certainly do require it, and I don't speak of Afghanistan without also speaking of Pakistan. For, in my view, these two nations are inextricably linked in a common insurgency that crosses the border between them.

You have all seen the challenges we have faced, particularly in the South and East, as Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters grow bolder.

You have seen the willingness of these disparate groups of fighters to better collaborate and communicate from safe havens in Pakistan, their ability to launch ever-more sophisticated -- even infantry-like -- attacks against fixed coalition positions, their increasing reliance on foreign fighters, and their growing and flagrant willingness to use innocent people as shields.

Add to this a poor and struggling Afghan economy, a still-healthy narcotics trade there, and significant political uncertainty in Pakistan and you have all the makings of a complex, difficult struggle.

I am convinced we can win the war in Afghanistan.

That is why I intend to commission a new, more comprehensive strategy for the region, one that covers both sides of the border.

It's why I have pushed hard for the continued growth and training of Afghan National Security Forces.

It's why I have pressed hard on my counterparts in Pakistan to do more against extremists, and to let us do more to help them.

And it's why the Chiefs and I recommended the deployment of a Marine Battalion to Afghanistan this fall and the arrival of another Army brigade early next year.

These forces, by themselves, will not adequately meet General McKiernan's desire for up to three brigades, but they are a good start.

I judge the risk of not sending them too great a risk right now to ignore.

My expectation is that they will need to perform both the training mission and combat and combat support missions simultaneously until such time that we can provide additional troops. I cannot at this point say when that might be.

Again, we must continually assess our progress there and in Iraq, weighing it against global risk and the health of the force before we make any more commitments.

And that, sir, leads me to my final point. As I once said about Iraq, let me now say about Afghanistan.

Absent a broader international and interagency approach to the problems there, it is my professional opinion that no amount of troops in no amount of time can ever achieve all the objectives we seek. And frankly, sir, we are running out of time.

We can train and help grow the Afghan security forces ... and we are. In fact, they are on track to reach a total endstrength of 162,000 troops by 2010. The Marines conducting this training are doing a phenomenal job.

But until those Afghan forces have the support of local leaders to improve security on their own, we will only be as much as a crutch, and a temporary one at that.

We can hunt down and kill extremists as they cross over the border from Pakistan, as I watched us do during a day-long trip to the Korengal Valley in July.

But until we work more closely with the Pakistani government to eliminate the safe havens from which they operate, the enemy will only keep coming.

We can build roads and schools and courts, and our Provincial Reconstruction Teams are doing just that.

But until we have represented in those teams more experts from the fields of commerce, agriculture, jurisprudence and education those facilities will remain but empty shells. Fewer than one in twenty PRTs throughout the country are supported by non-military personnel.

Afghanistan doesn't just need more "boots on the ground." It needs more trucks on those roads, more teachers in those schools, and more trained judges and lawyers in those courts.

Foreign investment. Alternative crops. Sound governance. The rule of law. These are the keys to success in Afghanistan. We can't kill our way to victory, and no armed force anywhere -- no matter how good -- can deliver these keys alone. It requires teamwork and cooperation.

And it will require the willingness by everyone in the interagency and international community to focus less on what we think we each do best and more on what we believe we can ALL do better together.

I know you understand that, and I appreciate all you do on this committee to support those of us in uniform. Thank you.