

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for Nomination of Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry
March 26, 2009

We can all agree that today Afghanistan, along with its neighbor Pakistan, represents the central front in our global campaign against terrorism. In the coming days, a new Administration will send a new Ambassador to Afghanistan to implement a new strategy. At this crucial moment, after too many years of drift in the place where Al Qaeda plotted 9/11, we simply must get our policy right.

In Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, the President has chosen an exceptionally skilled and deeply knowledgeable public servant to represent the United States in Afghanistan.

General Eikenberry has already served two tours in Afghanistan, most recently as the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan from 2005-2007. Because he knows the local terrain and the military side of the equation as well as anyone can, he is uniquely placed to get the civil-military balance right as Ambassador.

So it's clear that General Eikenberry is well equipped to hit the ground running. This is vital because the situation has been deteriorating at an alarming rate. Today, the Taliban is resurgent, attacks are up, US casualties are increasing, and confidence in the Afghan government's ability to deliver for its people is waning. In a region suspicious of foreign footprints, we don't have time to waste if we are to turn the tide.

The President has pledged to recommit to Afghanistan, beginning with the deployment of 17,000 additional US troops and a significant effort to increase the size and capacity of Afghan security forces. In 2006, I argued that more U.S. troops were needed. I still believe that. But troops alone will not bring victory.

Later today, I look forward to hearing from the Administration about the results of its strategic review. One thing is clear: Our military commitment must be matched by a comprehensive, bottom-up strategy that acknowledges Afghanistan's history of decentralized governance and recognizes the capabilities of our international and Afghan allies.

I agree with the President that our primary goal in Afghanistan is to make sure it does not once again become a launching ground for terrorist attacks against America or our allies. Achieving this goal will involve improving governance at all levels and helping the Afghan government to deliver better security and better services to the Afghan people.

At next week's NATO summit, the President will ask our allies to do more to shoulder this burden. We must persuade those countries unwilling to take on expanded combat roles to deepen their involvement in other aspects of the mission, including police training and development assistance.

More will also be required from the Afghan government. Corruption remains a powerful obstacle to progress. Too often, the judicial system and police force drive Afghans to the Taliban. President Hamid Karzai has promised to address this chronic problem—but as we devote more resources and put more soldiers in harm's way, we must insist on more in return.

Afghanistan's presidential elections this August will be crucial in restoring faith in the Afghan government. We will be watching closely to see that elections are free and fair, and that all candidates are allowed to campaign freely and safely.

Even as we work to strengthen the performance of the central government, we must also redouble our efforts to expand our reach beyond Kabul, empowering women and working more closely with trusted provincial leaders to ensure that development funds reach the Afghan people. One promising model for success at the local level

is the National Solidarity Program, which employs Afghans in reconstruction projects requested by village elders.

One of the most vexing governance challenges is the flourishing narcotics trade which provides a major source of funding for the Taliban. We need to provide greater subsidies and technical assistance for farmers who abandon poppy cultivation, as we have done in Nangahar province. But we must also crack down on drug lords and reduce production, employing sustained force when necessary, particularly in the Taliban stronghold of Helmand province.

Our strategy must also reflect the interconnectedness of the region's challenges. This requires redoubling our efforts to strengthen Pakistan's civilian government and support its activities against militants in the tribal belt. That's why I will soon be re-introducing with Senator Lugar the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, which seeks to triple non-military aid to the people of Pakistan while holding its security forces more accountable for assistance provided in their fight against the Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda.

We also need to reach out to Afghanistan's other neighbors, including India, China, and Iran. In 2001 and 2002, Iran helped to stabilize Afghanistan, and the Administration is right to explore how our interests might coincide again on this issue, beginning at the Hague Conference next week.

We went into Afghanistan to hunt down Al Qaeda and to replace the Taliban rulers who harbored them with a legitimate government strong enough to avoid destabilizing a vital and volatile region. Today that demands a more robust commitment of coalition troops and reconstruction aid. It is not too late to turn the tide in Afghanistan, but only a comprehensive strategy, sufficient resources and strong national resolve will lead to success.

I thank General Eikenberry for joining us here today and look forward to hearing his views on the way forward in Afghanistan.

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