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J. Randy Forbes
United States Congress

4th District, Virginia

November 12, 2009

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The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Gates:

In August 2009, General Stanley McChrystal wrote in his “Commander’s Initial Assessment” that “The situation in Afghanistan is serious; neither success nor failure can be taken for granted.” He went on to note that, “Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term (next 12 months)—while Afghan security capacity matures—risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible.” In the same month, President Obama noted that, “If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda could plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is... fundamental to the defense of our people.”

Our nation is at a critical junction in the conflict in Afghanistan. As my colleagues and I have not yet had the opportunity to address questions to any Administration official in a public hearing before the House Armed Services Committee since General McChrystal’s report, I respectfully request your answers to some of questions that have been weighing on my mind and in the minds of the constituents of my district and the American people.

- In your assessment, is the conflict in Afghanistan still a war of necessity?
- How does the Department of Defense define success in Afghanistan?
- What metrics are being measured to know when we have achieved these successes?
- Title 50 of U.S. Code requires a National Security Strategy within 150 days of a new President taking office. Did we have a national security strategy when the President ordered 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in March, 2009?
- Do we have a published National Security Strategy at the present time to guide deliberations as to the best course of action in Afghanistan?
- If we are successful in Afghanistan, is it your expectation that al-Qaeda forces would relocate elsewhere? Would we pursue terrorist cells in Pakistan, Somalia, Iran, Yemen, and the Philippines?
- General George Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, has repeatedly described that the Army is out of balance, particularly because our soldiers have not had as much time at home between deployments as they should. What will the various troop level options mean for projected dwell time for our soldiers and marines? What steps do you intend to take to mitigate these impacts?

I understand that the Administration has yet to make a final decision on its way forward in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it is my hope that the Administration that has promised to be the most transparent in history will provide lawmakers of the defense oversight committees the opportunity to hold public hearings with Administration witnesses to understand the challenges, risks, and possible courses of action facing the President, and our Nation as a whole, in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Randy Forbes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress