

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for the Nomination Hearing of
Karl Eikenberry to be Ambassador to Afghanistan
March 26, 2009

Among the many important decisions being made in the first months of the new Administration are those relating to U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. I welcome, Karl Eikenberry, who has been nominated to be our Ambassador to Afghanistan. General Eikenberry has served in numerous positions as a career military officer, including two stints in command of military forces in Afghanistan. He demonstrated exceptional diplomatic skill in these commands, as well as in his current assignment as Deputy Chairman of NATO's Military Committee. As our Ambassador to Afghanistan, General Eikenberry will be able to draw upon extensive experience in engaging international partners and facilitating a more collaborative effort with the Afghans.

I am encouraged by the renewed emphasis on Afghanistan as reflected in the appointment of Ambassador Holbrooke and the President's own statements about our policy. Nonetheless, many details need to be fleshed out as more resources and troops enter Afghanistan. I look forward to hearing the nominee's impressions of the Obama Administration's strategic review and of how we can improve Afghanistan's capacity to govern itself.

For the last several years, our government has struggled to gain greater European participation in Afghanistan. We are unlikely to succeed if military and political efforts in that country trend toward greater U.S. domination. Europe has strong incentives to cooperate closely with us to make the NATO mission a success. The September 11 attacks were planned in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda still operates there, and the fate of the country remains both strategic and symbolic. The drug trade emanating from Afghanistan impacts European society. And the instability in Afghanistan poses a threat to other states in the region. There should be no doubt that Afghanistan is a crucial test for NATO. Alliance commanders must have the resources to provide security, and they must have the flexibility to use troops to meet Afghanistan's most critical needs.

President Obama's election was greeted enthusiastically by most Europeans. During his campaign, he made no secret of his intention to elevate the priority of the Afghanistan mission. It is essential that the President and European leaders work together to finalize a plan for greater European commitment in Afghanistan.

The appointment of a General to be our Ambassador in Afghanistan effectively highlights the importance of interagency coordination between our civilian and military institutions. In this regard, I hope to hear from the nominee today how he intends to employ the experience of senior diplomats in his country team. I also hope the President will soon announce his choice of an experienced and proven USAID Mission Director.

In 2003, then Senator Joe Biden and I introduced legislation to improve the capacity of civilian agencies to respond to national security crises. Since then, this Committee has frequently emphasized and authorized greater civilian response capacity as a partner to our over-tasked military. Defense Department leaders, led by Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, and General Petraeus, have recognized the necessity of such a civilian partner. Multiple reviews of our policy in Afghanistan and Iraq have concluded that up to 80 percent of activities necessary in post-conflict and counter-insurgency situations are civilian tasks. Success in Afghanistan may depend on the attitudes of the people, the progress of reconstruction, and the development of the economy, as much as it depends on battlefield victories.

Last year, the Bush administration submitted a substantial FY2009 budget request to fund the office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization at the State Department. I understand that this office is now fully participating in our interagency planning and deploying civilians to the region. The emergent Afghan strategy appears to direct the deployment of substantial additional civilian capacity alongside the military. I hope that the forthcoming budget requests include at least as much as last year for the critical tasks of identifying, training, and deploying civilian experts. We should sustain the effort to unify such interagency coordination in the current Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization rather than build inefficient redundancies elsewhere.

I appreciate General Eikenberry's willingness to take on an extremely difficult mission, and I look forward to his testimony.

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