



Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
Hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
“Afghanistan: Continuing Challenges”  
May 12, 2004

OPENING STATEMENT AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for calling this hearing. Although our attention is focused on Iraq these days, we must never let ourselves be distracted from the urgent challenges in Afghanistan.

For the past two years, many of us on this Committee have been making the same basic points about Afghanistan:

First, the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan is a vital national security imperative of the United States. We cannot permit this country to again become a haven for terrorists.

Second, the reconstruction of Afghanistan will require a very significant investment of American capital, both financial and diplomatic. We can't do this on the cheap.

Third, without bringing security to Afghanistan, nothing else is possible. Unless we are able establish stability and basic order throughout the country, any reconstruction will be built on a foundation of sand.

Three simple points. And it would be tough to dispute any of them. But, looking at the Administration's performance since the fall of the Taliban, one has to wonder whether the White House has received the message.

On the issue of security, vast areas of Afghanistan are still disputed territory, with the resurgent Taliban launching attacks throughout the south and southeast. The movement is stronger now than it was two years ago.

Most of the rest of Afghanistan is only nominally under the control of the central government. Instead, it is brutal warlords who wield real power.

The Afghan Ministry of Defense has promised to disarm 40,000 of the nation's 100,000 warlord militiamen by June 30. According to the UN, as of last week, the number who had been disarmed was exactly zero.

*[AP report, May 6]*

The Administration has put forward the idea of training the Afghan National Army to combat the warlord militias—and someday this force will indeed be able to shoulder the burden. But today the ANA has an operational strength of just over 8,000—and few of these troops, if any, have the training or experience necessary for serious combat.

The warlord armies support themselves through the illicit profits of the drug trade. As several of our witnesses will describe in greater detail, this trade risks turning Afghanistan into a full-blown narco-state.

Under the Administration's watch, Afghanistan has firmly entrenched itself as the world's number-one supplier of opium and heroin. The opium crop of 2003 was up 7 percent from the previous year, to a near-record 3600 tons. The crop for this year is expected to increase another six percent. The drug profits amount to \$2.3 billion annually—five times the entire budget of the Afghan government.

**On the issue of reconstruction**, the Administration has failed to make good on the President's pledge of a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan.

According to the assessment of the World Bank and other authorities, Afghan reconstruction will require at least \$28 billion over the next 7 years. How do the commitments thus far add up?

To date, the world community has disbursed only \$3.7 billion in nonmilitary aid, with \$1.4 billion of this sum coming from the United States.

What's more, the vast majority of this aid has gone for humanitarian relief, not for long-term reconstruction. Relief aid is necessary to stave off immediate disaster, but it is NOT the basis on which to build a stable nation.

Looking to the future, there seems to be little encouragement in sight. Total pledges from all sources, ever since 2001, add up to less than \$10 billion, of which about one-third are American. And here the Administration's lack of long-term vision is apparent.

In the current fiscal year, the Administration proposes a marked increase in reconstruction funding—to \$2.2 billion, compared with a mere \$900 million for the past two years combined. This would be encouraging if it were the beginning of a program—but it seems, instead, to represent the end of the Administration's stepped-up commitment.

The Administration's request for fiscal year 2005 is barely half the rate for this year. [\$1.2 billion, 54% of FY 04]. That is not the kind of sustained commitment that Afghanistan needs.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to asking questions about Afghan policy to witnesses from the Administration. I am concerned, too, that the prisoner abuse scandal we've been contending with in Iraq could also touch Afghanistan – I very much hope the Administration will get all the facts out as quickly as possible and make clear what steps have been taken to prevent this from happening again. Mr. Chairman, I understand that you are planning to schedule a hearing, before the summer recess, at which we will be able to get answers on Afghanistan policy from top-ranking Administration officials. I look forward to that hearing, because this issue is too important to be put off any longer.

Today's hearing, however, will be informative and valuable. Our private witnesses bring a varied range of experiences and perspective to the discussion, from security to narcotics to nation-building. Let me also welcome the first Afghan graduates from a journalist-training program established by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty at my urging, with the strong support of Congress. Your work will be vital to building a free and open society in Afghanistan.

I welcome all of our witnesses.