

Chairman Lugar opening statement

Meeting with President Hamid Karzai

Today the Foreign Relations Committee is honored to welcome Hamid Karzai, President of the Transitional Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It is a privilege to have you with us to discuss the continuing challenges in Afghanistan. We have witnessed extraordinary events in your country and in ours since you visited this Committee in July 2000 to describe the conditions in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Your high profile U.S. visit and meeting with this Committee in January 2002 indicated the new importance of the U.S.-Afghan relationship. We greet you today as a friend and statesman who has demonstrated great courage and resolve in pursuit of a better future for the people of Afghanistan.

On February 12, this Committee launched the first in a series of meetings and hearings to review U.S. policy towards Afghanistan. We examined the ongoing efforts to assist Afghanistan in its recovery from the damage incurred under the rule of the Taliban and from former tenants such as Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Along with testimony from Administration officials on current plans and funding levels for Afghanistan, the Committee benefitted from the participation of Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United States, Ishaq Shahryar (Ee-shock Shah-ree-are). The Ambassador provided important testimony on the progress that has been achieved to date and your government's plans for the future.

Mr. President, the fate of your country is a bellwether in the global campaign against terrorism. Even as we combat terrorism on new fronts, we must not fail to consolidate the gains that have been achieved at great cost. The United States and the international community must not allow budgetary incrementalism or policy inattention to weaken our commitments to governments and peoples who have joined us in the war against terror.

Thus far, the United States has dedicated substantial resources to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and this Committee recognizes the efforts of an extraordinary cadre of American personnel who are providing military, political, economic, and humanitarian assistance. But the measure of our policy in Afghanistan is not what we are providing, but rather, what we ultimately achieve. For this reason, our Committee will continue to support and closely evaluate strategies for aiding the reconstruction of your country.

In my view, U.S. policy towards Afghanistan must address the following points:

First, we must work with allies to extend security beyond Kabul. At this critical stage, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is inadequate to provide security for political reconstruction and aid distribution to key areas of the country. I would recommend that the best way to infuse the ISAF with added capability and continuity in its leadership is to make it a NATO mission.

Second, the United States must work with Afghanistan and other states in the region to construct a long-term plan that addresses the threats associated with narco-trafficking.

Third, the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act created an enterprise fund. Some have questioned whether this tool is premature, given the limited utility of venture capital at this time. But I believe that the enterprise fund concept can be refocused to support infrastructure development and economic and business expertise that will be essential if Afghanistan is to develop a viable economy.

Fourth, the United States, and all nations that profess to be part of the alliance against terrorism, must be willing to commit additional resources to Afghanistan's development. There is strong advocacy on this Committee for providing the funds necessary to do this job right. We have the opportunity to help transform the former base of operations for Al-Qaeda into a stable democracy. Doing so would be a tremendous victory in the war on terrorism and a long-awaited opportunity for the Afghan people.

Our central question today is what more can be done to meet the security and development needs of Afghanistan? We welcome your recommendations on additional steps the United States could take to assist with security and to accelerate economic reconstruction.

In particular, we are interested in your views on the future of the ISAF and whether our Defense Department's plan to set up eight "provincial reconstruction teams" represents a viable alternative to expanding the ISAF. We also would appreciate your assessment of the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act, which Congress passed last November, authorizing \$3.3 billion in reconstruction and security assistance.

President Karzai, usually this Committee meets heads of state privately in S-116, a much smaller room in the Capitol. But because of the enormous challenges your young government is facing and the importance of Afghanistan to the United States, I thought that we should break with Committee practice and conduct our meeting in public. My hope is that our discussions will provide the American people and the international community with an inside look into the current conditions in your country and the threats that you face daily.

Though it will take time to fully recover from the years of turmoil and strife your country has endured, Afghanistan has made remarkable progress under your inspired leadership. I am optimistic that Afghanistan and its people can consolidate these gains and begin to build a prosperous and secure future.

The United States must be a part of this effort. If we are able to help Afghanistan transition into a secure democracy, we will bolster our ability to attract allies in the war against terrorism. Our commitment to Afghanistan is also a demonstration of how we will approach post-conflict Iraq. American credibility is on the line in these situations, and we must understand that failure to follow through could have extremely negative consequences in the war on terror. As evidenced by our hearings and meetings so far, the members of this Committee have demonstrated strong support for American commitments toward Afghanistan.

Mr. President, before turning to you for introductory remarks, I'd like to recognize the Ranking Member, the Senator from Delaware.

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