

**Statement of Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing  
“Afghanistan at a Crossroads”  
October 15, 2009, 10:00am, Room 2172 Rayburn**

Mr. Chairman, the issue being addressed in this hearing is an important one, and we have an impressive group of witnesses to share their expertise and recommendations on how to address the threats to U.S. security posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

I had hoped, however, that Administration officials would have finally made themselves available to testify on the implementation of the strategy in Afghanistan.

I would like to reiterate pending requests for a full committee hearing as soon as possible with senior Administration witnesses.

Given the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan, it would be our preference that the Department of Defense and the Department of State make both General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry available to testify before the Committee so that our chief diplomat in Afghanistan and our commander in the field can provide a complete accounting and description of the resources, programming, and management of United States assistance to, and activities in Afghanistan.

As the President stated in his March speech on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the objectives of American policy in Afghanistan are clear: we want to create an Afghanistan from which Al Qaeda, the Taliban and their allies have been disrupted and destroyed.

He then outlined a civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign to defeat the al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan, including through the emergence of a democratic government in Afghanistan able to secure itself from internal threats like the Taliban or the return of Al Qaeda; and it should have the support of its people, earned through the provision of a reasonable level of government services and reduced corruption, and be determined to never again provide a safe haven for militant extremists.

Such an effort requires effective planning, and this is especially true of resources.

To prevail against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Administration must fully implement the strategy without any further delays.

It has been 76 days since General McChrystal submitted his review to the Administration requesting additional resources and the clock continues to tick.

Delay endangers American lives. I say this not just as a Member of Congress, but as a mother whose daughter-in-law served as a Marine fighter pilot in Afghanistan.

Delays allow the threat against our security interests to grow.

As Bruce Riedel, who coordinated the Administration's first Afghanistan-Pakistan policy review earlier this year, stated in a recent interview with the Council on Foreign Relations:

“At some point there is a cost to delay. And that cost comes in how our partners and how our enemies respond. Our NATO partners are already a bit squeamish. The Pakistanis are already beginning to wonder about the seriousness of the American commitment.”

I am also concerned about efforts to minimize the threat from the Taliban and the debates over whether the United States should pursue an exclusively counterinsurgency or counterterrorism strategy.

On the latter, Mr. Riedel -- again, the individual hand-picked by the President to conduct the first interagency review of Afghanistan policy -- also dismisses as a “fairy tale,” and “a prescription for disaster,” the notion that the Taliban could be separated from al-Qaeda or that al-Qaeda could be eliminated simply by bombing its leaders in Pakistan.

Thus, a shift to a predominantly counterterrorism campaign utilizing airstrikes and the like is clearly insufficient to beat back the threat to America's interests that the Taliban and al-Qaeda present.

We should not be short-sighted and consider US strategy in terms of either an exclusively counterinsurgency or counterterrorism strategy.

Often counterinsurgency is not at odds with, but complementary to, ongoing counterterrorism operations.

In this respect, I would greatly appreciate our witnesses' consideration of the following questions: Has the mission in Afghanistan been clearly articulated, both in terms of our strategic objective, our supportive objectives, and how these are being translated into programs? How would you define the resource constraints that the US is encountering in Afghanistan, and what are your recommendations for prioritizing both US and international resources?

The Afghan elections have become a serious problem, but they are only a symptom of a far more serious disease. What are your recommendations for assisting the Afghans in improving both the quality of governance, and countering the corruption that has become endemic? What are your recommendations for addressing the lack of unity of effort in the NATO-ISAF? Additionally, what are your recommendations, for matching the resources a given country can bring to the task and/or its domestic political willingness to fight? Finally, what are your recommendations for integrating the strategy for Afghanistan into a broader strategy to deal with the threat posed by global jihadist networks, and provide for regional security and stability?

U.S. personnel in the field in Afghanistan must be given the resources they need to defeat our enemies.

American lives, not just policies are at stake.