

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Verma, Richard R <VermaRR@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, July 16, 2010 2:25 PM
To: H
Cc: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: Re: Corker

And pasted below is the exchange between Corker and Holbrooke:

CORKER:

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I want to thank the ambassador for coming. I know he has a wealth of knowledge and certainly served our country for many years.

A number of us wrote a letter to you asking for this hearing, and my guess is you might have had hearings any way. But the reason we wrote the letter -- bipartisan letter -- was to provide Congress and the American people with a definition of the end state for our civilian operations in Afghanistan, clear objectives for the civilian mission, and a detailed plan for achieving those objectives, and the very specific, measurable metrics being used to measure progress towards achieving those objectives.

I have to say, I've been here for an hour and 10 minutes. I have heard nothing -- nothing -- about that. And while I respect the ambassador, I've heard a lot of process. I've heard a lot about meetings. I have no earthly idea -- no earthly idea what our objectives are on the civilian front.

And I don't know if you have time to begin doing that right now, but this has so far been an incredible waste of time, from the standpoint of -- of hearing, though.

And I have tremendous respect for you, but maybe we have the wrong witness. I hope we'll have maybe Secretary Clinton and Eikenberry, maybe Crocker. I know he's supposed to come.

But could you answer the question that was the purpose of these hearings in the first place?

HOLBROOKE:

I'm sorry. You don't feel that I've told you what our civilian programs are?

CORKER:

You've told me a lot of process. I'd like to know a definition of what our end state is for civilian operations, the very question we asked when we set this hearing up, is in Afghanistan, clear objectives for the -- for the -- detailed plan for achieving those. I'd like to hear you talk about that.

I mean, I'm glad we have a lot of interagency folks here, but I'm not hearing anything that talks about where we're going.

I'd also like to know how the withdrawal date that's been set affects that and how it affects those we're working with in the country.

HOLBROOKE:

First of all, Senator Corker, I believe I have discussed our civilian programs in very considerable detail within the constraints of time, but we did prepare a report for this committee earlier this year, which was entered into the record and which I will be happy to enter into the record again, if you wish. And you can go through every one of the programs.

The reason I brought my colleagues with me was to show that this was a whole-of-government, an unprecedented effort.

Now, on the specifics, since you want specifics, Afghanistan is an agricultural country. It exported agricultural products until 1978 and the Soviet invasion. We are trying to rebuild it. This was not being done for the first seven years of this war.

We have -- your -- your committee has given us a great deal of money for agriculture. And we are spending it wisely in a joint AID- USDA effort, which Senator Lugar has particularly been involved in, food, seeds, cash-for-work programs, encouraging alternatives to opium production.

HOLBROOKE:

Secondly, rule of law. We are spending -- we are spending the money you have authorized for us to create a justice system which can cut into the Taliban's propaganda about corruption and lack of a justice system.

Third, counter-narcotics. We have ended poppy eradication, a radical change, because all we were doing by eradicating poppy seeds, poppy crops, was driving farmers, poor farmers, into the hands of the Taliban.

Fourth, a major program of subnational governance, where we are putting aid directly to the district level.

Fifth, a major effort in specific areas, some of which were alluded to earlier, such as electricity for Kandahar. Senator Kerry asked earlier about Kandahar. One of the major issues here is to bring electricity to the people as a benefit of the international presence.

The whole range of activities we have is designed to support the country and to support General Petraeus' counter-insurgency effort. He and I -- I was his counterpart until two weeks ago when he moved to Kabul. We have worked intimately in an effort to create a joint civilian-military effort. And I am happy to provide you with every detail you wish in private briefings on behalf of me and my team.

Point number two in regard to the end state issue you raised. I want to be clear on the difference between end state and exit strategy.

If we -- this is my personal view, senator -- but if we walk away from Afghanistan, again, as we did 21 years ago, the consequences will be similarly catastrophic, because of the unique strategic position of Afghanistan and the reaction that would have in Pakistan, China, India and the country to Afghanistan's west, Iran, as well as the larger region that includes Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, and even extending to Western Europe, which is concerned about terrorism from that region, just as much as we are.

So, I hope that when we talk about end state, we talk about a sustainable end state which involves continued American economic and development assistance, and we continue to fulfill our obligations to train the police and the military. This will not be cheap. But it will be a fraction of the money that is now being authorized and appropriated for the military campaign.

When we will be able to transition to that is impossible for me or anyone to say. But it won't be on a single day. It will be a gradual process. And that is what the review in December and the president's decision-making will focus on.

CORKER:

In our foreign policy, generally speaking -- I know we've had some rough times over the last several years -- it's been something that we've been able to address in a bipartisan way. And I think that the issues that you're dealing with, that we're dealing with in Afghanistan are incredibly tough.

I still don't -- I haven't understood what the administration was saying in the beginning. That's not to be critical of them. I just don't understand. I still don't understand. I've met with you and your staff over at the State Department. It's just incredibly vague to me.

And I think what we are doing, we have partners, which include the Pakistanis and everybody around, that they don't know what we're doing. They don't know when we're leaving. They think we're leaving shortly, I think. We've just had colleagues who have come from there.

We've had a -- we've got a president there that's having to play both sides, because he wants to survive, because he doesn't know what our intentions are. The Pakistanis don't know what our intentions are, I don't think. And they're making accommodations on both sides.

So, I just have to tell you, I send letters to parents and spouses. And what I feel because of this lack of clarity is that we are in Afghanistan, because we're in Afghanistan, and that we don't have the will to be successful. And we don't have the will to leave, because of some of the things you just outlined.

But I just don't hear any clarity. And again, I want to support the administration. I want to support you, because that's what we need to do as a country, is let the shores (ph) align (ph), let the partisanship.

But I have to tell you, as a person who wants to do that, I still don't understand. OK? And I have average intelligence, so I would ask you to, please -- or maybe let's have some witnesses in here that can shed more light or be more specific. But I don't understand, and I'm very concerned.

And I think we're sending a lot of mixed signals. And I think there's a lot of dissension. Actually, as I listen to you, even within the administration itself, and that has to end.

And I just ask you, please. You have a lot of experience, help us understand. You haven't done that today. And I would ask the chairman to please have some witnesses come in and explain to us what the end state is, what we can envision Afghanistan being whenever this withdrawal does take place, because I still do not understand.

We've changed it. Now it's sort of a degraded country where they have conflict, but it's not out of control. I mean, the bar continues to change. And I'm just concerned as an individual, and yet I want us to be, if we can, all on the same page as much as possible. But I think to do that, this has got to be much clearer than has been outlined.

HOLBROOKE:

Senator, I'm sorry that my answers don't fully satisfy you. But I want to be very clear on this, because I understand your comments and I respect them.

First of all, the core question -- the one you are asked by your constituents, and I'm asked by everybody -- why are we in Afghanistan? The short, simple answer is 9/11, direct threats to our national security interests, and the fact that while our enemies against our homeland are on the Pakistani side of the border, this is a single struggle. And we have to strengthen the Afghan government and let -- and teach it to stand on its own feet over time, so that we can move forward, while we do other things that fall outside the scope of this hearing, to dismantle, deter and defeat Al Qaida.

Now, if you do not believe that it's a threat to the homeland, then we have an honest difference of opinion. But I think the Times Square bombing incident shows clearly how dangerous that situation is.

Secondly, on the civilian mission, again, it's in support of a single, civilian-military, counter-insurgency mission. And we have benchmarks, requested and required by the Congress, and submitted to you. And our overarching goal here is always the same, to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaida and prevent its ability to threaten the United States.

And we believe, all of us -- and there is no division on this in the executive branch -- that the situation we face out there is a direct threat. We believe that before the Times Square situation occurred, and I don't think anything could have proved it more vividly.

And to achieve this, we have to degrade the Taliban as well, because they are part of the enemy's structure -- a different part, but an integral part -- that we face.

Now, the Afghan government doesn't yet have the capacity to deal with this on its own. How could they after 30 years of war? And so, the civilian part of it, the things I've just mentioned to you -- police, government capacity, rule of law, subnational government, training provincial officials, women's empowerment and a whole series of other major issues -- are part of our civilian programs.

And we're happy to come back up to your office -- we appreciated your visit to us -- and continue this dialogue.

Our civilian strategy is designed from keeping Al Qaida at bay, and it's designed to help Afghan institutions establish conditions for stable governance. Our plan has these benchmarks, which have been briefed to you and your colleagues, and we're happy to discuss them in detail at any time.

----- Original Message -----

From: Verma, Richard R

To: 'HDR22@clintonemail.com' <HDR22@clintonemail.com>

Cc: Sullivan, Jacob J

Sent: Fri Jul 16 13:30:08 2010

Subject: Corker

Wants to talk with you re Afghanistan and his displeasure with Holbrooke. They got into a verbal sparring match at the hearing. I thought holbrooke was polite and responsive.