

*Oct. 1 - The U.S. Role in Afghanistan and Pakistan*

**Mr. CASEY:** I rise tonight, as we continue work on this Defense appropriations bill, to talk about the challenges we face in Afghanistan and Pakistan and will be sharing some thoughts tonight which I know are consistent with a lot of the concerns that have been expressed over the last couple days and weeks and months about the policy going forward and what we confront as a country when it comes to both the strategy going forward with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As we do in any conflict, with any threat, we face the grave question of war and what will happen to our military strategy, what we will ask of our troops, what we will ask of the American people, both in terms of our blood and treasure, as well as what is the strategy going forward.

I think when we confront the grave question of war, we have to get it right. I believe the stakes are higher with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan than they were even in the conflict we waged in Iraq. I believe the stakes are higher for our national security. So we have no choice but to get it right. And when I say “we,” I think there is a lot of discussion, debate, and focus on President Obama and his administration. That is appropriate because he is the Commander in Chief.

But there is probably not enough discussion about what the Congress is going to do, what this Congress should do or not do and, in this case, what the Senate should do or should not do. I think we would be better off spending our time focusing on a substantive and thorough debate in the Senate rather than just pointing a finger at the President, the administration, and saying: They have to do this or the President must do this.

It is important, when we talk about getting this policy right, that the Senate gets it right. If the Senate puts the time in to debate and discuss these critical issues--and there is a lot to do in a rather short amount of time. I believe the President should be given a reasonable amount of time to review this policy.

As we know, he set forward a strategy this past spring, in March, our policy with regard to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. If you remember how he articulated the mission, he talked about defeating al-Qaida, disabling and dismantling al-Qaida, and he talked a lot in his remarks about Pakistan, about what would happen with regard to our strategy in Pakistan.

But I believe there has not been today in the Senate anything approaching a full and robust and thorough and substantive debate about what we are going to do going forward in Afghanistan or Pakistan. I hope people on both sides of the aisle, when we begin this debate--we have done some of it; we need to do a lot more--that we don't just dust off talking points from the war in Iraq, that we don't just dust off or employ sound bites. There is a time and place to use sound bites and discussions and debates. But if we are going to get this policy right, it is not going to be a Democratic solution or strategy only, and it will not be a Republican solution or strategy only. We have to get it right. That means we have to do a lot better than we did when it came to the debate before and during the war in Iraq, which is still a conflict that is ongoing, even as we draw down troops. We have to have a much better debate in the Senate on Afghanistan and Pakistan than took place here with regard to Iraq. That is an understatement. Sound bites will not do it. Political rhetoric and positioning will not do it because that is not a full debate.

In short, what we have to do--the administration has to do it, but we have to do it as well--in the Senate is get the strategy right and debate the strategy before we have a long debate about resources. That is critically important. I know there are a lot of people in Washington who want to focus on one or two issues and make it simple--you are either for or against this or that. We have a long way to go. We have not had a debate about strategy. We have had a lot of discussion and coverage of resources, be they troops or other resources, military or nonmilitary. We have not had a discussion about the strategy. We have to do that first--strategy before resources.

I had the opportunity, as many of our colleagues did in the summer, in August, to go to both Afghanistan and Pakistan for a limited period. But even in a short amount of time, one can learn a lot--2 days in Afghanistan, 1 day in Pakistan. One of the highlights of my visit to Afghanistan, after having been there in May of 2008, was the briefing from General McChrystal, a tremendous and thorough overview of what is happening on the ground, the threat to our national security as he sees it, also a review not only of the military strategy and the military challenges but the nonmilitary as well.

Sitting at the same table with General McChrystal were distinguished Americans who are serving us in nonmilitary capacities--the Department of State, the USAID, the Department of Agriculture, all kinds of help from various Federal Government agencies that involve the other part of counter insurgency, not only the military campaign.

Obviously, we have to do more than that. General McChrystal, like many of his predecessors, is doing everything he can to get this right.

I, like others, have reviewed his classified report. We have heard him give a summary of the strategy. It is very important that we weigh those considerations and weigh that assessment seriously going forward. General McChrystal's report is one of the things we have to weigh. We have to weigh a lot of other things as well. We have to listen to experts within our government and outside, experts within the administration, experts in the Congress. The Senate is made up of so many Senators who have long records on foreign policy as well as national security and making sure we get this right. Some are Democrats, some are Republicans, and some are Independents. I will draw upon, as we all should, that experience. I will talk more about that in a moment.

One thing stressed by General McChrystal--and it has been stressed by President Obama and the administration and should be stressed by us--is this policy, this strategy going forward in Afghanistan has to involve a couple of basic elements. It obviously has to involve and be focused on security. That is essential, obviously. But in addition to security and the military challenge, we also have to be concerned about governance. And we are concerned about the results of the election. We are concerned about whether President Karzai is doing what he needs to do to govern his country, to have a strong judiciary, to deliver services to his people, to make sure the people of Afghanistan have confidence in his leadership.

So we have to be concerned about security and governance but also, thirdly, development, what is going to happen on the ground. A lot of people working as part of provisional reconstruction

terms, so-called PRTs, are doing great work on the ground. It is not in the newspaper very often. It is not heralded like a battle is or like a controversy might be, but that is part of building up communities throughout the country in Afghanistan so people can take control of their own lives, take control of their own communities, and take control of their own security and their own future.

We also had a chance to talk at length about what is happening in Pakistan and the threats that come across the border from Pakistan into Afghanistan, threats that involve al-Qaida or other extremist or insurgent groups that have some loose confederation with or connection to al-Qaida and threaten our national security, threaten the security of the Afghan people, and even threaten the security of the Pakistani Government. These are very difficult challenges we face. They do involve our national security. We have to get it right with regard to what we do in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan.

I mentioned before there were a number of Senators in both parties who have been trying to begin and amplify the debate. I happen to be a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. Our chairman, Senator Kerry, has had a number of hearings on various aspects of this policy, not only going back the last 2 or 3 weeks but going back months. That informs this debate. Chairman Kerry has shown great leadership on these issues as well as broader national security issues.

Chairman Levin gave a speech recently that laid out a thoughtful approach. He talked about building up the Afghan Army and the National Police prior to a serious consideration of additional troops. He wants to accelerate, as we all do, the building up of the Army and Police in Afghanistan and maybe in a much shorter timeframe. That is critically important. We have to spend a lot more time talking about and debating and informing ourselves about how best to accelerate the training of the Afghan Army and Police. Chairman Levin, as well, has shown, through his leadership of the Armed Services Committee, how important these issues are.

On the other side of the aisle, I read a Wall Street Journal piece recently by John McCain, ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, Senator Lindsey Graham, and Senator Lieberman. We have to consider those points of view, not just in that op-ed but in other discussions and debates on the Senate floor.

As I said before, there will not be one party that is going to solve this. There is not going to be one party to implement a counter insurgency strategy because when it comes to war and when it comes to the nonmilitary challenges we have that are connected to a war or a campaign, there is not a Democratic or Republican way to fight a war. There is only an American way. We need an American solution. We need a kind of consensus that we may not need on some other issues, but on this one, to get it right, we are going to need both parties. And we will need the support of the American people to get it right.

Finally, let me say one more word about why we are doing this, why we should have a thorough debate going forward, why it is important we spend a lot of hours here, not just on the floor of the Senate but in hearings and discussions and briefings with various experts who come before us, and to thoroughly question and ask the tough questions of the administration.

I was glad we voted today on a list of administration officials we want to come before the Senate after the President makes fundamental determinations about this policy. Once he has made a decision, then we should have a series of hearings where we can cross-examine not only General McChrystal and the underpinnings of his policy but so many others in the administration, a very strong administration, I would argue, on foreign policy and national security. I will not go through all the names tonight that would give evidence to that.

Finally, if we are going to get this right for the fighting men and women we send out on the battlefield, if we are going to get this right for taxpayers who will be financing this effort, whether it is military or nonmilitary, we do have to get it right. One thing we have to bear in mind is, when we send troops out to fight a battle, we have to make sure the policy that undergirds their fight, that the strategy that leads to a discussion about what the resources are to give them all the resources they need to fight a battle, whether it is very wide or very narrow in focus, whatever it is, we have to make sure what we do here is worthy of their sacrifice; that what we do in the Senate on strategy or policy is worthy of what we are asking them to do on the battlefield. We haven't done that yet. We are a long way from doing it.

I hope in the next couple of weeks, even as the President is asking tough questions and making determinations about policy, that we do our job in the Senate to ask those tough questions, to have that important debate, and make sure it is substantive and not political; make sure it is about strategy and not just the politics or the sound bites of the moment. To be worthy of their valor, those fighting men and women, and to be worthy of their sacrifice, we have to do our job in the Senate. That has not happened yet. We have to make sure we do that in short order.