

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary of State Hillary Clinton by
Representative Barbara Lee
House Foreign Affairs Committee
“U.S. Strategy In Afghanistan”
December 2, 2009**

(Received after printing of transcript)

Question 1:

Timeline/Political Progress

In a recent interview prior to his strategy announcement, President Obama stated, “I’m confident that at the end of this process, I’m going to be able to present to the American people in very clear terms what exactly is at stake, what we intend to do, how we’re going to succeed, how much it’s going to cost, how long it’s going to take.”

Unfortunately, I still have not heard how much this war will cost by its end, how it will be paid for, and most importantly, a clear and certain timeline for bringing the war to a close.

What will the withdrawal process look like after 18 months? At what pace will combat troops be redeployed?

Answer:

Regarding the transition start date, it is imperative to understand that July 2011 is the beginning of a process. It is not when we rush for the exits; rather, it is when we begin the responsible drawdown of our forces and the gradual, conditions-based hand-off of missions to our Afghan partners – with full consultation and consensus with the Government of Afghanistan. The specifics of the transfer of security process are still in development in Kabul. There is no determination of how long this will take and there is no withdrawal date on the right-hand side of July 2011. We will begin a responsible and measured drawdown of our troops in July 2011 based on conditions on the ground.

Question 2:

What specific conditions on the ground need to be met to end our military presence and when do we expect to meet them?

Answer:

We aim to degrade the Taliban-led insurgency while building sufficient Afghan capacity to secure and govern the country. This has a number of implications for the military mission, which now focuses on six operational

objectives: reverse Taliban momentum; deny the Taliban access to and control over population and production centers and lines of communication; disrupt Taliban outside of secured areas and prevent al-Qaeda from gaining sanctuary; degrade Taliban capabilities to a level at which the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) can effectively combat the Taliban; increase the size and capability of ANSF while leveraging local security forces; and build the capacity of the Afghan government. There is no determination of exactly how long this will take. We will, however, begin to draw down our forces in July 2011, and expect to begin to transition to an Afghan lead in some areas before that time.

Question 3:

I remain convinced that Afghanistan requires a political solution, not a military one. This will require a concerted diplomatic and regional effort for political reconciliation.

Do you agree with the recently reported U.S. intelligence assessment that only 10% of the insurgency is ideologically motivated?

Answer:

While it is extremely difficult to say exactly how much of the insurgency is ideologically motivated, we are encouraging non-ideological Taliban to reconsider their future through programs we are administering with the Afghan government. These programs – including governance, economic development, and reintegration – are providing alternate livelihoods to would-be and current Taliban fighters and, in the case of reintegration, specific incentives designed to draw current combatants away from Taliban sway. We want to encourage those fighters who are not motivated by extremism to withdraw from the battlefield with the right incentives.

Question 4:

Is the Administration pursuing a political solution to the Taliban, as a means of isolating Al Qaeda and providing the security space needed to assist the Afghan people?

Answer:

We support a national Afghan-led reintegration and reconciliation process. Afghan-led reintegration – the process of reaching out to insurgents and mid-level commanders to offer them a way to break with the insurgent senior leadership and return peacefully to their communities – remains a key pillar of our strategy for Afghanistan. As President Obama has said: "We will support efforts by the Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights of their fellow citizens."

Reintegration is a component of a larger counterinsurgency strategy focused on protecting the population. Reintegration is not a question of paying people to switch sides, but creating conditions – through community-based programs and other efforts – whereby fighters have incentives to put down their weapons, renounce violence and join a peaceful political process.

Question 5:

What is the plan to pursue and sustain regional cooperation from Pakistan, India, China, Iran and others?

What specific diplomatic benchmarks or goals is the Administration pursuing with these regional parties and on what timeframe?

Answer:

As we move forward in Afghanistan, we are undertaking an unprecedented effort with many countries whose interests are affected by instability in Afghanistan, and we are coordinating international efforts to better achieve our goals. We have a vibrant dialogue with our allies and international partners through the Special Representatives group, in which we continually discuss and coordinate efforts. In the month of January alone, there will be at least four international meetings or conferences at which we will coordinate on Afghanistan policy, culminating with the international conference on Afghanistan hosted by the United Kingdom on January 28. Moreover, we have engaged several key partners, including China, Turkey, Russia, and Egypt, in bilateral cooperation consultations regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan and expect to move forward with concrete joint projects with each of these countries in the coming months. We will continue to consult India about achieving lasting stability in Afghanistan and the region. India has already committed over \$1.2 billion in reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan, and provides health and humanitarian assistance to many Afghans.

In addition to coordination with regional and international allies, we place particular emphasis on coordinating our Afghanistan and Pakistan policies. We believe a strong, stable, democratic Pakistan must be a key partner in the fight against violent extremism, and people in Pakistan are increasingly coming to the view that we share a common enemy. I heard this repeatedly during my recent visit. Our relationship needs to be anchored in common goals of civilian governance, robust economic development, and the defeat of those who threaten Pakistan, Afghanistan, the United States, and the rest of the world.