

HEARING OF THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ( PART 10 )

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REP. J. RANDY FORBES (R-VA): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank the three of you for being here. We only have five minutes. I'll try to keep my questions concise and ask you to do the same on your answers. General Keane, we have appreciated so much your testimony over the years, and I know from the period from 1999 to 2003, you were the vice chief of staff of the United States army, and we relied a lot on your testimony.

During that period of time when we were in Afghanistan, did we have a strategy? Now, I'm not saying it was the right strategy, but did we commit troops to Afghanistan with no strategy at all while you were the vice chief of staff?

MR. KEANE: We deposed the regime, if you remember, with the assistance of the Northern Alliance and our special operation forces and air power. And I thought that was fairly brilliant, frankly, and the Central Intelligence Agency conceptualized that, and I think it was a better plan than what we had in the Pentagon, just to be honest about it. But then, very quickly, listen, in December of 2001 was the first time, sitting together as a senior four-star, that I was told that they were thinking that we were going to go to war in Iraq. That was December of 2001. We dropped Afghanistan, the Taliban in November, if you can remember, of 2001. And then, General Franks was given instructions to make plans, and his organization intellectually started to get its arms around a much larger problem of going to war in Iraq. And some of us argued at the time that, while I could see Iraq in the future as to why something like that may in fact need to be done, if we were not able to get our hands on the WMD issue. What concerned us was the fact that we would take resources away from Afghanistan.

REP. FORBES: General Keane, just because my time's going , my question is not whether you thought the strategy was right or wrong. Did you have a strategy at all for Afghanistan?

MR. KEANE: The strategy for Afghanistan after deposing the regime and bringing in a surrogate government under Karzai was a very minimalist strategy. I mean, the fact of the matter is, the leadership at the time believed that, and you probably are aware of this, that the last thing that we wanted to do was nation build, and I think that was an overreaction to the previous administration.

And what we wanted to do was stand up the host country, don't create an artificial dependency on us and give them the minimal resources so that they would bring their ministries and their services that they need to provide on line much faster, as opposed to the more robust model that was used in Bosnia, which many of the people in the administration felt created this artificial dependency or protracted it.

That was the strategy. I think it was the wrong strategy, to be quite frank about it. I think time certainly has proved that to be the case.

REP. FORBES: And Dr. Biddle, let me ask you very quickly.

You said that the analytical benefits of war in Afghanistan is a close call. In other words, I take it, depending on which side you chose in terms of the analysis, you could make that decision as to whether or not we should be in the war or not be in the war. Is that a fair assessment?

MR. BIDDLE: There are serious counter arguments to either position.

REP. FORBES: If that's the case, then, how would you determine is this a war of necessity or a war of choice?

MR. BIDDLE: I try to think that that's a distinction of degree rather than kind in most wars, but clearly, we have alternatives to the policy we are now adopting in Afghanistan.

REP. FORBES: Would you call it a war of necessity or a war of choice, if you had to make the call?

MR. BIDDLE: I suppose it's more of a war of choice than a war of necessity, but I think most wars involve a degree of choice.

REP. FORBES: Dr. Pillar, you retired, I think in 2005 from the intelligence community. Since that time, have you had any access to classified information or anything like classified information that was going on about Afghanistan?

MR. PILLAR: No, sir, I have not.

REP. FORBES: Do you agree that General McChrystal is the best that we have to get that kind of information from as to what's going on in Afghanistan now?

MR. PILLAR: I would presume we have multiple sources of information. He, as the theater military commander, would have one channel of information.

REP. FORBES: Would you want to talk to him if you were developing a strategy?

MR. PILLAR: Certainly.

REP. FORBES: General Keane, do you agree that you told us that we should rely on General McChrystal's judgment? Do you believe that he's the best that we have right now, as far as an assessment of Afghanistan?

MR. KEANE: Yeah, I do, and let me just add something. I mean, it's, look, after we took the Iraqi military down, our military was very ill-prepared for counter insurgency. Intellectually, and in any, in terms of doctrine, lack of training, and it was true of our generals. No fault of theirs. Fault of people like myself who were running the military, and didn't provide that kind of foundation. We have been at this now for a long time, and we are very good at this, and McChrystal is at the top of our game.

He has been at this for five years. He's got (a) huge amount of experience, and he has the intellect to deal with -- the judgment and the experience. And he also has a great mentor in Dave Petraeus. The two of them are the best, probably, that's ever been put together. So I value their judgment quite a bit, in terms of what needs to be done, because I believe they've got a handle on it.

REP. SKELTON: (I) thank the gentleman.