

Today Members received another classified briefing on our policy in Afghanistan, a briefing that raised a number of questions that need answers before our country commits further troops and resources to that conflict. These are not loaded questions or simply rhetorical, they are real questions – and just some of the real questions – that people in Central New Jersey are asking.

Would this proposed troop increase bring us closer to capturing or killing those responsible for the 9/11 attacks? If the al Qaeda remnant Americans are seeking to capture or kill is on the Pakistani side of the border, or in Yemen or East Africa, how will sending more troops to, say, southern Helmand Province in Afghanistan help us to get those terrorists who attacked us on September 11 or might attack us in the future? Should we send troops to where al Qaeda isn't? Should we expand our aerial strikes? Would an escalation in air attacks do more harm than good? Is our intelligence apparatus structured and capable of giving our military and political leaders the intelligence they need to wage this war? Given our lack of foreign language capabilities, can we really know what's going on in the towns and farms and villages? Does the deterioration in the military and political situation in recent years in Afghanistan result from actions Americans have taken or failed to take? If so, how do we avoid those problems in a surged military action? What constitutes victory or success in this conflict? What is it that we hope to leave behind once we exit Afghanistan? What can we reasonably hope to leave behind?

Is the Afghan Government a viable partner? Is it viewed as legitimate by the Afghan people? Does the government and do the people have the same dedication to human rights, education and public welfare that we do? If so, how will our military troops bring improvements in those areas? Do the Afghan people have the same revulsion to official corruption that Americans do? Can the Afghan security forces be expanded as quickly as claimed? Is President Karzai correct that he needs extensive military U.S. security assistance for 15 or 20 more years? Will such assistance require the use of many private security contractors? If so, what will such a reliance on contractors cost the American taxpayer? If contractors are employed extensively in Afghanistan, do the State and Defense Departments have sufficient oversight mechanisms to ensure those contractors operate more legally and ethically than they have in, for example, Iraq? What lessons from Afghanistan's history can we learn about the population's reaction to the long-term presence of foreign troops on their soil? Could Afghanistan degenerate into a civil war along ethnic and religious lines, as happened in Iraq?

Is the Government of Pakistan a viable partner? Are they serious about helping us? Are elements of their military and security services still supporting the Afghan Taliban who are attacking our troops? What if President Zadari is overthrown, as has happened with previous leaders?

Will our allies actually provide the troops the President is requesting? And if they commit 10,000 troops and we have 90,000 troops, will it be seen as an international effort or an American war? If European countries' troop casualties rise sharply next year, will those nations pull out of Afghanistan and leave our troops to bear the future burden?

Should we pay for the war openly and up front? Or should we commit troops and consider how to pay later? How would we pay for such an escalation, including the long-term costs of caring for our wounded veterans? Is the Department of Veterans Affairs hiring enough psychological counselors to treat the number of veterans who need counseling and treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder? Do we even know how to treat PTSD of veterans who have endured two, three or more combat tours? What should we make of the fact that the estimated \$100 billion we'll spend on the war each year is equal to the cost of the health reform bill each year that we are debating now?

Are there alternatives to the President's approach that Congress and the Nation should explore? What is truly the best way to secure our country against future terrorist attacks? Are we putting the right emphasis on a military approach to counterterrorism policy? When extremists can transmit their ideology and recruit terrorists over the Internet and via extremist madrassas and youth groups, are we fighting on the right battlefield in Afghanistan? Are we doing enough at home to prevent future tragedies like the one that occurred at Fort Hood?

Fulfilling our constitutional obligations regarding matters of war and peace requires that Congress get answers to these questions and many more, and help the American people get these answers.