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Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control Holds Hearing on Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan

*Examined production, sale and distribution of illicit drugs that
fund Taliban, undermines stability*

Washington—U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), co-chairs of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, held a hearing today examining U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan.

The hearing explored the production, sale and distribution of illicit drugs in the country that funds the Taliban, corrupts public officials, and undermines political stability and the rule of law. The hearing highlighted the future of counternarcotics efforts in the country as U.S. troop levels are reduced in the coming years.

Senator Feinstein also honored fallen DEA Special Agents killed in a 2009 helicopter crash after a firefight with Taliban drug traffickers.

Senator Feinstein's opening remarks:

"I am holding today's hearing to assess our counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan as we begin the drawdown of international troops.

I think we can all agree that the Taliban has morphed into a hybrid. It is one part terrorist organization, one part global drug trafficking organization.

For the past two years, virtually every heroin processing lab raided by the DEA, U.S. Special Forces, and Afghan Police had ties to the Taliban. What our forces find when they raid drug labs is not only large quantities of opium and heroin but also improvised explosive devices, – IEDs – bomb making materials and Taliban training

manuals. In just one raid last year, 2,056 pounds of the highest-grade heroin with a wholesale value of \$56 million was seized.

Experts agree that it may take many years to get the drug trade in Afghanistan under control. Therefore, as the U.S. military begins to scale back its presence this month, we must ensure that our civilians continue to support counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan.

A year ago this month, the Caucus released a bipartisan report entitled, [“U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan”](#) which contained several policy recommendations. I would like to highlight progress that has been made and what remains to be done.

First, the good news:

The Caucus recommended increasing the capacity of the Afghan counternarcotics forces. With the support of the State and Defense Departments, the Afghan Counternarcotics Police Vetted Units were doubled in size and now have over 500 officers.

Corruption in Afghanistan is a huge problem and the Caucus recommended that: “Whenever possible, U.S. law enforcement personnel assigned to assist the Afghan police in drug investigations should expand those cases to include targeting corrupt Afghan officials.”

The investigation of narcotics cases has in fact led to corruption cases, most notably the arrest last year of Mohammad Zia Salehi, the head of Afghanistan’s National Security Council and one of President Karzai’s most trusted staff members. A U.S.-sponsored vetted unit conducted court-authorized wire intercepts that led to evidence that Salehi was soliciting a bribe of \$10,000 and a new car to impede an investigation of a money exchange firm that is alleged to have funneled \$3 billion in undeclared cash out of the country.

The Caucus’s report recognized that it is essential to remove the leadership of Afghan drug trafficking organizations. Investigators have been successful in targeting top-level Afghan drug traffickers who support the Taliban with the federal narco-terrorism statute and, when possible, have gotten those kingpins to the U.S. to face justice.

This leads to the bad news:

While we have a strong narco-terrorism law and several ongoing proactive investigations, there is no extradition treaty between Afghanistan and the United States. Therefore, it is up to the Afghan government to decide on a case-by-case basis if they will allow these individuals to stand trial in the United States. Unfortunately, this has

not happened since June 2009 when Haji Bagcho was brought to the United States for trial.

Our report also suggested increasing dedicated assets for air support of counternarcotics missions prior to the U.S. military drawdown. While the State Department agreed to purchase two Sikorsky S-61 helicopters for counternarcotics use, the Director of the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Air Wing advised Caucus staff that based on the mission requirements, a total of six S-61s are needed. Additionally, I recently learned that the two S-61s' delivery is not expected until 2014. This is very troubling, and I hope we can cut through our government's red tape to get these helicopters to Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Before I close, I would be remiss not to mention that the counternarcotics effort has not been without sacrifice. On October 26, 2009, three DEA Special Agents were killed in a helicopter crash after a firefight with Taliban drug traffickers that also claimed the lives of seven servicemen. On October 29, 2009, the remains of [DEA Special Agents Forrest Leamon, Chad Michael, Michael Weston](#) and the fallen U.S. service members were met by President Obama at Dover Air Force base who honored the men and paid his respects at the dignified transfer ceremony.

Co-Chairman Grassley and I wish to convey our deepest condolences to the families of those DEA agents who gave their lives fighting narcotics trafficking in Afghanistan and hereby enter their obituaries into the record for today's hearing."

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