

Chairman Edolphus Towns

Full Committee Hearing

“Afghanistan and Pakistan: Oversight of a New Interagency Strategy”

June 18, 2009

The Committee will come to order. Today the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs are holding a joint hearing to continue our extensive oversight of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

At the outset, I want to thank Chairman Tierney for his continued leadership in this area over the last two-and-a-half years. Since Chairman Tierney took the reins of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, it has devoted substantial time and resources to oversight of U.S. policies, programs, and operations in this vital region, with significant results.

In March, President Obama announced a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The heart of the new strategy is to approach Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries, but one integrated theater of diplomatic and military operations.

Clearly, neither al Qaeda nor the Taliban can be permanently eliminated if they can easily escape back and forth across the porous border between the two countries. That is why the strategy uses a more focused counterinsurgency campaign, along with better coordination of civilian and military efforts.

Importantly, the new strategy puts a much needed emphasis on bolstering the capabilities of Afghanistan's and Pakistan's civilian governments. The Afghan and Pakistani people must be able to rely on their own governments to provide security, deliver basic services, and enforce justice. The U.S. government cannot do it for them. Instead, we must work to rapidly build-up the internal capabilities of the Afghan government in particular to reduce its long-term reliance on the United States.

In Pakistan, the government there faces a tremendous challenge to reassert its authority over areas that have long operated with near autonomy. The President's policy recognizes that the United States must rely on Pakistan to confront the extremists within its own territory.

From an oversight perspective, our efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan require much greater transparency and accountability than we have seen in the past seven years. The House recently passed a bill to significantly

increase U.S. military and economic aid for Pakistan. In Afghanistan, the U.S. is spending billions of dollars annually for basic development projects and to support the Afghan army and police.

The security environment in Afghanistan makes it particularly difficult to monitor the expenditure of Federal funds. In addition, government corruption is rampant. These factors significantly increase the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse for U.S. aid programs.

We now know that billions in U.S. assistance that went to Iraq over the first few years of that effort were misspent, squandered, or simply unaccounted for. We do not intend to let that history repeat itself in Afghanistan. With that in mind, this Committee intends to conduct continuing and extensive oversight of U.S. spending in Afghanistan.

I would also like to point out that Afghanistan is one of the world's major sources of heroin. By all accounts the heroin trade plays a significant role in Taliban financing. For that reason, I believe that counter-narcotics should be a priority activity of our efforts in Afghanistan.

Thank you again, Ambassador Holbrooke and Undersecretary
Flournoy, for your appearance here today and we look forward to your
testimony.