

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein
“Future U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan”

January 15, 2014

We are here today to discuss a problem that has no easy solution, yet we ignore it at our peril: the Afghan drug trade. It contributes to nearly every major problem Afghanistan faces. The narcotics trade funds the Taliban, it increases corruption and it poses a serious public health challenge in Afghanistan and abroad. As the United States draws down the troops in the country, we must find a way to sustain our counternarcotics efforts and improve those policies that have not worked as well as they should.

Unfortunately, there is little good news coming out of this country on counternarcotics.

- **First**, as you can see on the chart behind me, poppy cultivation reached a record level of 209,000 hectares in 2013, so it’s up 36 percent from the 2012 level. That’s over a third increase in one year.
- **Second**, the Taliban continues to finance its terrorist activities through the drug trade. Estimates suggest the Taliban receives between 100 and 150 million dollars a year from narcotics-related activity, a significant portion of its estimated \$400 million annual budget. As just one example, in 2012, Afghan Drug Kingpin Haji Bagcho was sentenced to life in prison in the United States on drug trafficking and narco-terrorism charges. According to the Department of Justice, Bagcho used some of his drug proceeds to provide cash and arms to the former Taliban governor of Nangahar and two Taliban commanders who are responsible for insurgency activity in eastern Afghanistan.

In July 2010, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control released a report on this country arguing that the Taliban’s financial involvement in the drug trade poses a threat to our nation’s security. That’s no less true today than it was three and a half years ago.

- **And last, but not least**, there are 1.6 million opiate addicts in that country which is over 5 percent of the country’s population.

In advance of today’s hearing, we provided our witnesses with eight draft recommendations on how we could sustain and improve our counternarcotics efforts in this country Afghanistan in the coming years. So, I would like to highlight just a few of them, and the purpose for giving you all them is we want to hear what you think about them: what will work and won’t work.

- **First**, as our funding declines, we need to internationalize our counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that Russia may be the largest consumer of Afghan heroin in the world with 1.7 million opiate users. The United States and Russia might and should work together much more closely in combating this drug trade and encouraging other countries to contribute to the effort. Iran has a major impact. My understanding is that literally thousands of border patrol agents have been killed trying to enforce the Iranian border. So there may be many areas of disagreement with Iran, but this is one area where we should agree. Counternarcotics is that area.
- **Second**, I have been very supportive of the Helmand Food Zone program which is an integrated approach to eliminating poppy cultivation that includes eradication, alternative development, a public information campaign and drug demand reduction. As a matter of fact, I had the privilege of meeting with the President's person for counternarcotics, Dr. Osmani, on I think three occasions. He is now the Foreign Minister of the country, and so I guess no longer connected to the food zones.

This effort is now being replicated – with our support – in Kandahar. In carrying out this program, I think it is really important to not simply focus on crop substitution but also look at non-farm income. Far too often, alternative crops are promoted where they are susceptible to crop failure and for which there are no domestic or international markets. So our suggestion is that a greater focus be placed on promoting manufacturing and providing micro-lending so that individuals can start small businesses.

- **Third**, the DEA has provided key support to Afghan-led vetted units which target drug kingpins and terrorist financing earned through the drug trade. United States funding in Afghanistan should continue to support these units.

So, I very much welcome the witnesses today. I now turn to my Co-Chairman, Senator Grassley, for his opening statement.

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