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House of Representatives
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Opening Statement

Jeff Flake
Ranking Member
National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee

Hearing on
“Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding and Engaging Regional Stakeholders”

March 31, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is our fourth hearing on Afghanistan. We have discussed many aspects of this conflict during these previous hearings, but I believe that this is the most important in the series so far.

As we all know, this is not just an academic discussion. Just last Friday, President Obama announced his strategy.

He described the situation in the region as “increasingly perilous.”

He reported that al Qaeda and its allies are actively planning attacks on the U.S. from their bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

President Obama’s plan relies on using existing alliances, and forging new ones, to fundamentally change conditions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He described a regional approach to address the global threat that al Qaeda poses to both westerners and Muslims alike.

This is the first hearing on this topic in any House committee since the President announced his strategy.

Because of the Chairman’s foresight, we now have the first opportunity to examine some of the Administration’s assumptions and recommendations.

It is appropriate that our subcommittee examine this strategy closely. President Obama calls for a “whole government” approach to U.S. efforts in the region. Our committee’s unique jurisdiction allows us to explore the interagency challenges that he will face and gives us the authority to recommend reorganizing antiquated national security structures.

The experts joining us today are well suited to discuss the effectiveness of the President’s proposed strategy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are also able to help us to understand how we may better support our nation’s efforts in that region.

I look forward to a future hearing with the Administration to examine the specific details of their Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy.

I also look forward to, under the Chairman’s leadership, examining the national security lessons we have learned in the past and exploring how they can be applied under this new plan.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for your efforts in organizing this hearing. I look forward to our witnesses’ testimony.