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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
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Opening Statement

The Honorable Jeff Flake, Ranking Member

**Hearing on
“Training and Equipping Afghan Security Forces:
Unaccounted Weapons and Strategic Challenges”**

**National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
February 12, 2009**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The Oversight and Government Reform Committee has a unique mandate. Unlike authorizing committees with narrow jurisdiction, the Committee has broad authority to oversee nearly all federal programs, policies, and procedures. It does this with an eye toward weeding out waste, fraud, and abuse, and to ensure proper management and administration.

But we are not simply an oversight committee.

In our “reform” capacity, this Committee must articulate constructive solutions. We must ensure that when we examine a program or initiative, we also identify more efficient and appropriate mechanisms to achieve the same ends. In so doing, it is essential that the individuals responsible for developing and implementing policy are present at every hearing to explain their actions.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to using this approach in overseeing the national security and foreign affairs arena.

The United States faces many national security challenges. At the forefront is terrorism. Since 9/11, we have been combating terrorism in two theaters; one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. In both cases, this Administration continues significant policies outlined by the Bush Administration.

We must also ensure that the programs supporting this effort are fiscally responsible and effective.

Today’s hearing is an excellent place to begin our oversight and reform efforts.

Afghanistan is at the forefront of our anti-terrorism efforts. Since 2001, we have spent billions to build a democracy secure from the Taliban and resistant to corruption. Afghanistan has made progress in many areas.

With our help, Afghan men and women democratically elected a government. Since that time, that government has worked with coalition partners to create an Army and Police force. These forces are essential to ensuring a stable government and society and will benefit the Afghan people. At the same time, ridding Afghanistan of dangers posed to the United States helps us as well.

There has been measured success, but it has been difficult.

Today, we will hear testimony concerning studies which show that procedural shortcomings mean the U.S. military cannot account for one-third of the weapons supplied to Afghan forces. We also have witnesses here to comment on the progress of other efforts to train and equip Afghan forces.

I look forward to their sober assessments.

An iron-clad system to inventory and track arms is essential. The loss or theft of weapons could significantly damage our efforts. If our military cannot account for arms, then civilians could be at risk, American lives may be jeopardized, and our limited resources are wasted.

By that same token, if our efforts to train the Afghan Army and Police forces are in vain, then we need to find a better use for that money.

With a trillion-dollar stimulus bill on our desks, a Defense supplemental on the horizon, and press reports about forthcoming reductions to the Defense budget, we must ensure that our policy directives are clear, and that proper directives exist for handling weapons destined for our allies.

Noticeably absent today, however, is a Defense Department or State Department representative to speak about prospective Administration policy in these areas.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to a follow-up hearing when we can hear from the Obama Administration on how it has reacted to the three studies we will hear about today.

Mr. Chairman, I am delighted to join you on this panel. I look forward to working with you in this Congress, and I look forward to this first of many important hearings.

Thank you.