

## **Statement of John F. Tierney**

### **Chairman**

### **Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs**

### **Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

## **Hearing on “Afghan Elections: What Happened and Where Do We Go From Here?”**

**November 19, 2009**

Good afternoon. Today’s hearing asks the question: what happened with the Afghan presidential election held on August 20th, and what can the United States and the donor community do about Afghan government legitimacy and governance going forward?

Since 2002, a key component of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan has been to extend the authority of the Afghan government, encourage government-wide reforms, support the government’s provision of basic services like electricity and water, and nurture the growth of Afghan civic institutions. A weak, corrupt, and unjust Afghan government that does not have the support of the Afghan people cannot survive for long against the strain of a sustained Taliban insurgency campaign. Hence, the long-term U.S. strategy in Afghanistan is largely predicated on having a legitimate and capable government in Kabul.

Both Pakistan’s and Afghanistan’s partnership with the United States and international community are vital to achieving many U.S. objectives including disrupting, displacing, and defeating al Qaeda. Unfortunately, despite sizable U.S. and international aid efforts, the Afghan government has proven deficient in providing Afghan citizens with basic government services and legal protections. Further, the Afghan government has been wracked by a failure to adequately address extraordinary levels of corruption within its ranks.

Mounting U.S. and international frustration with incompetence and corruption in Afghanistan came to a head with the August 20, 2009 presidential election. The widespread and massive voting irregularities, as reported by the UN and others, have by all accounts undermined the Afghan government’s legitimacy in the eyes of its own people and those of the international community. What should have been another milestone in the long road towards democratic legitimacy and stronger governance was instead a missed opportunity for all Afghans, and for the United States.

Widespread government corruption is a critical hindrance to Afghan development. According to the Congressional Research Service, “[b]ecause of corruption, only about 10 percent of U.S. aid is channeled through the Afghan Government...”

In short, the ability of the Afghan government to re-establish some semblance of democratic legitimacy and to effectively provide basic government services is undoubtedly weighing heavily on President Obama’s ongoing review of U.S. strategy in the region.

The failure of the Afghan election and the inability of the government to provide effective governance are not for lack of U.S. funds. The United States spent approximately \$200

million in support of the August 20th election, and, in total, all donors contributed over \$300 million. Further, since 2002, the United States has spent almost \$2.7 billion for democracy, governance, rule of law, human rights, and election support in Afghanistan. As an oversight committee, we are charged with determining whether U.S. taxpayer funds have been well invested, wasted, the subject of abuse, or the victim of fraud. It is fair to inquire how it is that such an investment could have been made only to foster such an unsatisfactory result. Moreover, we must know who is responsible, and how such travesty can be avoided in the future.

Shortly we will hear from witnesses who can inform us what, in their view, went wrong in the Afghan presidential elections in order to draw and apply lessons from that difficult experience. The ultimate question, however, for today's hearing is how do we move forward? What can the United States and international community do on the question of legitimacy of and performance of the Afghan government given the long track record of failure over the past eight years?