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Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs

"Training and Equipping Afghan Security Forces: Unaccounted Weapons and Strategic Challenges"

As Prepared for Delivery

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Today, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs holds our first hearing of the 111th Congress by continuing our sustained and constructive oversight of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

During the 110th Congress, this Subcommittee sent three Congressional Delegations to Afghanistan and Pakistan and held seven oversight hearings. This Congress, the Subcommittee intends to continue our rigorous oversight.

In fact, I led another Congressional delegation to Afghanistan and Pakistan that just returned last week. Joining me were Subcommittee Members Chris Van Hollen, Peter Welch, and Chris Murphy, as well as Representatives George Miller and Ron Kind.

My overriding takeaway from this fact-finding trip – whether it was meeting with Presidents Karzai and Zardari, with our U.S. Ambassadors and General McKiernan, or with NGOs and other experts – is that we are in a unique moment to ask fundamental questions about U.S. efforts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

What are we trying to accomplish? What are willing to do to get there? What do we as a government have the capacity and resources to achieve? And, most important, as a public servant, what will Members say when they look into the eyes of the parent who sacrificed their son or daughter to this effort?

I'm encouraged that President Obama's new administration is conducting a top-to-bottom review of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, and my hope is that many Congressional Committees will also be actively involved.

I can assure all of you that this Subcommittee will be. We'll be asking tough questions and examining, among other issues, aid accountability and efficacy, including the use of private contractors; U.S. targeting procedures; the capacity of various U.S. government agencies and departments to carry on needed activities; and the development of the rule of law and justice sector.

In July 2007, the GAO reported about the shortcomings of the U.S. military's efforts to account for weapons involved in the Iraq train-and-equip program. In January 2008, Congress passed a law requiring that "no defense articles be provided to Iraq until the President certifies that a registration and monitoring system has been established" and it listed what the system should include.

Our hope was that lessons learned in that conflict would inform policies in other conflicts.

To ensure that this happened, this Subcommittee, together with the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, requested that GAO review the accountability for weapons that the Defense Department obtained, transported, stored, and distributed to the Afghan National Security Forces.

We asked the GAO to investigate whether the Defense Department could account for weapons intended for the Afghan army and police. We also asked to what extent has the U.S. military ensured that the Afghan National Security Forces could properly safeguard and account for weapons and other sensitive equipment issued to them.

The GAO report released today answers those questions, and what GAO uncovered is disturbing.

The International Crisis Group recently put the importance of the Afghan police this way: Policing goes to the very heart of state building…. A trusted law enforcement institution would assist nearly everything that needs to be achieved in [Afghanistan].

A RAND Corporation study commissioned by the Secretary of Defense on counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan even placed the importance of the police ahead of the army:

Building the police in counterinsurgencies should be a higher priority than the creation of the army because the police are the primary arm of the government in towns and villages across the country…. They have close contact with local populations in cities and villages and will inevitably have a good intelligence picture of insurgent activity.

The issue we address in detail today – weapons accountability – serves as an important – and tangible – harbinger of how we've been doing so far with U.S. and international efforts to train-and-equip the Afghan police.

The GAO concludes, and I quote, that "[a]ccountability lapses occurred throughout the supply chain," including by the U.S. military "not maintain[ing] complete records for about 87,000, or about 36 percent, of the 242,000 U.S. procured weapons shipped to Afghanistan;" by not being able, and I quote, to "provide serial numbers…for about 46,000 weapons;" and by "not maintain[ing] reliable records for about 135,000

weapons [the U.S. military] obtained for [Afghan National Security Forces] from 21 other countries." We will hear from the leader of that investigation.

We will also hear about the Defense Department Inspector General's parallel investigation that found similar accountability lapses in training and equipping Afghan National Security Forces. The Department of Defense Inspector General's (DOD IG's) report concluded that, and I quote, the "accountability, control, and physical security" of arms, ammunition, and explosives could be compromised and vulnerable to "misplacement, loss, or theft."

In August 2008, the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence put it this way about what's at stake: "The security of conventional [arms, ammunition and explosives] is paramount as the theft or misuse of this material would gravely jeopardize the safety and security of personnel and installations worldwide."

Let's go back to the families of U.S. soldiers who pay the ultimate price for our security. What if we had to tell families not only why we are in Afghanistan, but why their son or daughter died at the hands of an insurgent using a weapon purchased by U.S. taxpayers? But that's what we risk if we were to have tens of thousands of weapons we provided washing around Afghanistan, off the books.

The Defense Department has acknowledged these serious shortcomings, has concurred with all three of the GAO's recommendations, and appears to be taking concrete steps to bring greater accountability in transfers of arms to the Afghan army and police.

General Formica – the Commander of the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, or CSTC-A – put it this way when we met with him in Kabul a week ago. I quote: "We got better because of the GAO report."

But there's a huge amount of remaining work to be done, something General Formica also admitted.

And it's not just weapons and ammunition that we're talking about. Specified sensitive defense items, such as night vision devices, pose a special danger to the public and U.S. forces if they fell into the wrong hands.

Yet CSTC-A began issuing 2,410 such devices to Afghan National Army units in July 2007 without establishing controls or conducting enhanced end use monitoring. It was some 15 months before an end use plan was developed. Some 10 devices remain unaccounted for.

This Subcommittee will be watching intently. The stakes are simply too high to get this wrong.

But even beyond keeping track of the weapons we give to the Afghan army and police, there are more fundamental problems, especially with the efforts to ramp up the Afghan police. For instance, the training of Afghan police continues to lag significantly behind that of the army.

In order to examine these broader challenges in training-and-equipping the Afghan police, we will hear today about a recently released International Crisis Group report entitled, "Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy."

This report found that "too much emphasis has continued to be placed on using the police to fight the insurgency rather than crime." In addition, it notes that "a deteriorating security situation and political pressure for quick results has continued to obscure longer-term strategic planning" and that there "needs to be a much greater coherence of approach and streamlining of programs."

Last year, the State Department Inspector General's Office warned:

> Confidence that the government can provide a fair and effective justice system is an important element in convincing war-battered Afghans to build their future in a democratic system rather than reverting to one dominated by terrorists, warlords and narcotics traffickers.

After 30 years of conflict and seven years of U.S. occupation, the patience of the Afghan people is being sorely tested.

A recent poll by The Asia Foundation found that 38 percent of Afghans think the country is headed in the right direction (compared to 64 percent in 2004) while 32 percent feel it is moving in the wrong direction (compared to 11 percent in 2004).

These findings are reinforced by the ABC News poll released on Monday showing that 40 percent of Afghans think their country is headed in the right direction (compared to 77 percent in 2005) while 38 percent think the country is headed in the wrong direction (compared to 6 percent in 2005).

As we contemplate a new strategic overview about to be adopted by the new Administration, the condition of the Afghan National Security Forces will be of paramount concern. Included in that concern is the ability of those forces to operate, to secure territory gained and weapons afforded them, and how this all relates to the broader U.S. efforts and plans in Afghanistan.

Let us be perfectly blunt to the American people about the difficulty of the challenges ahead. The reports highlighted at this hearing as well as this Subcommittee's recent meeting with General Formica in Afghanistan indicate serious impediments: poor security for stored weapons; illiteracy hampering efficient operations; corruption; high desertion rates; and unclear guidance.

The Defense Department has particularly noted significant shortfalls in the number of fielded embedded trainers and mentors, which currently serves as a primary impediment to advancing the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces. CSTC-A officials reported in December 2008 that they only had 64 percent of the 6,675 personnel required to perform its mission overall, and only about half of the 4,159 mentors they require.

As we listen to today's testimony, I trust it will help inform whether Congress needs to legislate procedures to safeguard weapons in Afghanistan – as we did for Iraq – or to take other action here.

The challenges are immense, but this is just too important not to get right. As I said at our hearing last year on efforts to train and equip the Afghan police:

> Seven years after the invasion of Afghanistan the stakes here remain enormous – put simply, effective and honest Afghan police and a well-functioning justice system are critical to the future of Afghanistan and to the security of all Americans. We simply must do better, and time is of the essence.