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Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
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Hearing on “Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding and Engaging Regional Stakeholders”
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Good morning and welcome. Today the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs broadens our in-depth oversight of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan by examining the vital role of regional players – including India, China, Russia the Central Asian Republics, and Iran – in achieving lasting security, peace, and prosperity in this troubled part of the world.

As you can see on this and on the monitors on either side of the hearing room, Afghanistan and Pakistan share a 1,600 mile long border with each other – the so-called “Durand line.” These two countries, in turn, are bordered by six independent nations – Iran and Turkmenistan on the western flank, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, and China and India to the east. Beyond these immediate borders, other regional powerhouses like Russia, Saudi Arabia, and other Persian Gulf States have had – and continue to have – significant sway on both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

For far too long, the role of regional players has not been on the radar screen, quite frankly, of U.S. foreign policymakers. But one need only take a cursory look at the histories of both Afghanistan and Pakistan to know how vitally important outside influences have been and continue to be.

Afghanistan, for example, has been the “chess board” for international and regional power struggles between the U.S. and Soviet Union and between Pakistan and India. And to truly understand what makes Pakistan tick you must first examine its relationship with its eastern neighbor – India.

Understanding the role of these regional actors is not new to this Subcommittee. For example, we held hearings more than a year-and-a-half-ago on the need to engage Iran and concluded that there was a better way “*beyond saber rattling.*” In fact, our past hearing entitled, “*Negotiating with Iran: Missed Opportunities and Paths Forward,*” explored the cooperation Iran provided after 9/11 to drive the Taliban out of Afghanistan.

Today – I hope – is a new day in Washington, as a regional security approach to South Asian security appears to now be on everyone’s mind. Most importantly, President Obama just released a new Afghanistan / Pakistan Strategy this past Friday that makes regional security a priority.

Central to the Obama Administration's new approach is that we must "*treat Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries but one challenge*." The President has also made it absolutely clear that we must, and I quote, "*pursue intensive regional diplomacy involving all key players in South Asia*." Further evidence about the new focus on regional actors can be found in the appointment of Ambassador Holbrooke, an accomplished diplomat and deal-maker, as Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Today – I hope – is also a new day on the international scene. As we listen today from our distinguished panel of witnesses, an 80-member strong U.N.-sponsored international conference is convening in The Hague on South Asian regional security, and Secretary of State Clinton and Iranian representatives will be in the same room. Last week, the Shanghai Security Organization – consisting of Afghanistan's six neighbors – met in Moscow with the U.S. in observer status, for the first time, to examine regional security issues.

Unless all regional actors are engaged with and ultimately view a stable Afghanistan and Pakistan in their own best interests, these neighbors will continue to exert behind-the-scenes pressure and up-front materiel support to their Afghan proxies. It is hoped that – one day – these regional actors will not only withhold from playing harmful roles, but will, in fact, play positive and constructive ones.

There seems to be emerging consensus that Afghanistan will be unlikely to emerge as a nation in control of its own borders, able to serve its citizens, and head down the road towards prosperity unless regional players are engaged and supportive. And Pakistan will not be able to truly come to terms with its terrorist challenges until a more mutually beneficial arrangement can be had with India.

In short, there is no realistic option ... there will be no long-term security for either Afghanistan and Pakistan ... other than through the cooperation and support of the region's other countries.

We have come a long way from looking at Afghanistan and Pakistan in isolation. The role of regional security is now front-and-center ... but that's just step one.

We must go beyond just recognizing the vital role of regional players and now examine how the U.S. and our allies can constructively engage them. What is the best way to proceed? What are the top challenges, easy wins, and where are the "red" lines?

As we move from words to action, we must truly strive to understand how these regional players see their *own* national interests, and we must explore what will motivate each of these neighbors to play constructive roles.

I am very pleased to have with us today an esteemed group of experts in South Asian affairs to help us in this endeavor. All of you bring a wealth of scholarly

knowledge and practical on-the-ground experience ranging throughout this region. I look forward to learning and to hearing your specific recommendations.