

Statement of Congressman Paul Hodes

Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs Hearing: “Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding a Complex Threat Environment”

March 3, 2009

Chairman Tierney, Ranking Member Flake, thank you for holding this important hearing today on U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This hearing will be critical to the Subcommittee’s work on understanding the challenges we face in these two nations, how these challenges are connected, and how we can help the new administration overcome them.

It has been nearly six years after then-Defense Secretary Rumsfeld announced an end to major combat in Afghanistan. However, our Coalition fatalities have increased in each of the last five years. President Obama has expressed the need to refocus our military and diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The complex landscape of political, tribal and cultural dynamics requires that the U.S. examine how best to target our resources in the region.

One of our goals in this region has been to close off the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan as a safe haven for terrorists, but this goal has not yet been met. The continued struggle we are having in Afghanistan is a symptom of the insurgent safe haven in these parts of Pakistan. In order to achieve our goals in the region, we must gain a deeper understanding of the issues at play in this part of the world, and how to stop the growth of insurgents.

I believe eliminating this safe haven is so critical to our success in Afghanistan. I hope to work with members of the Subcommittee to consider strategies for achieving this goal. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists today on these issues.