

**Statement of John F. Tierney  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Hearing on “Troops, Diplomats, and Aid:  
Assessing Strategic Resources for Afghanistan”**

**As Prepared for Delivery**

**March 26, 2009**

This morning, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs continues our sustained oversight of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The challenges we face in South Asia are breathtakingly complex. And oversight of U.S. programs, deployments, and spending requires an appreciation of the underlying ethnic tensions, historical grievances, and regional dynamics. The lines of conflict and the aspirations of the people have unique characteristics that call for serious consideration by U.S. policy makers charged with achieving U.S. national security interests.

Problems this complex require that we use both a microscope and a telescope. As such, the Subcommittee has spent significant time during this opening congressional work period to examine and investigate Afghanistan and Pakistan through a variety of different lenses.

Two weeks ago, we held a public hearing featuring a panel of experts explaining the nature of the threats emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Last week, the Subcommittee followed up with a classified briefing conducted by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Next Tuesday, we will hold a hearing entitled, “Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding and Engaging Regional Stakeholders” that will explore these countries through the lens of geopolitics and regional tensions and opportunities.

Today, we turn our attention to the kind of footprint the U.S. should have in Afghanistan. How many troops? How many diplomats? How many aid workers?

These questions – all of which involve deployment of U.S. citizens to a war zone – weigh heavily on those of us with the responsibility of public service. But, at their core, these questions should be preceded by one fundamental question: what are we trying to achieve in Afghanistan?

We hold this hearing as the Administration prepares to release its Afghanistan and Pakistan strategic review. Ranking Member Flake and I have been in communication with the Administration to ensure that the Subcommittee receives a full briefing once this review is finalized.

While the particulars of the Administration’s strategic review are still being sorted out, we do know some things. For instance, President Obama has already authorized the deployment of an additional 17,000 troops to Afghanistan. The nature of any recommendations for increased deployments of military or civilian personnel beyond this remains the subject of great speculation and debate, although reports have leaked that President Obama is planning some kind of civilian surge as well.

Other leaks indicate that the Administration’s new plan will aim to significantly boost Afghan army and police forces, and to expand covert warfare, including airstrikes, in western Pakistan.

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let’s return for a moment to that most fundamental of questions – what do we seek to achieve in Afghanistan?

One of our recent witnesses described our effort in Afghanistan as a “counter-sanctuary” objective. Under that approach, we would need to prevent Al Qaeda or like-minded

international terrorists from establishing a safe haven from which they can plan and execute attacks against U.S. citizens at home or abroad.

Putting aside the fact that Al Qaeda appears to have established a safe haven in western Pakistan – and has or could likely do so in any number of other places in the world – and that 9/11 was largely planned in Hamburg and Miami, it strikes me that a “counter-sanctuary” strategy differs greatly from a “counter-insurgency” strategy.

Eliminating sanctuaries requires a fairly small military or covert footprint that is focused on disruption and containment, whereas counter-insurgency could require huge amounts of personnel and resources to ensure security and to support indigenous efforts to exert police power and extend social benefits to an ambivalent or resistant population.

I have stated before that we find ourselves at an ideal moment for a fundamental reevaluation of our goals in Afghanistan and our efforts to protect U.S. citizens from international terrorists.

I do not seek to prejudge our witnesses or the Administration’s strategic review. However, I do think that – with precious blood and scarce treasure at stake – it is incumbent on the Administration to come forward with a compelling case for U.S. commitments.

And it is incumbent on those of us in the U.S. Congress to conduct thorough and thoughtful oversight and to ask the tough questions.

In the end, we use the microscope and the telescope to ensure we don’t use a machete where a scalpel will do.