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House of Representatives

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Ranking Member Robert Garcia

Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs

Hearing on “Accountable Assistance: Reviewing Controls to Prevent Mismanagement of Foreign Aid”

March 21, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Grothman.

We obviously know that oversight of our federal budget is very important.

And it’s really important that part of that oversight is foreign aid as well. Foreign aid we know is about 1% of the federal budget, comparable to defense spending, which is about 12% of the budget. That 1% makes an incredible impact across the world, certainly not just obviously in some of the conflict zones where foreign aid oftentimes is very critical but also in building our relationships with our allies and strengthening our position across the globe.

We know, as we speak, foreign aid is also critical in conflict zones. Unfortunately, my friends in the Majority right now are currently blocking \$60 billion to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

This aid is absolutely crucial to help the Ukrainian people defend themselves.

Ukrainians are fighting for their freedom and democracy against Vladimir Putin—a war criminal who has attacked America’s democracy as well.

And here are some facts: our government has more than 400 people working to oversee our foreign aid. The Inspectors General from the Defense Department, the State Department, the United States Agency for International Development, all work with 20 other federal agencies and the Ukrainian government. There is deep oversight with how we spend our support and our taxpayer dollars.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record this [list of more than 145](#) completed, ongoing, and planned oversight reports and investigations from the Special Inspector General for Operation Atlantic Resolve.

The Ukrainians themselves are fighting for their existence. They want and need our aid to make the biggest possible impact, too.

Transparency International’s 2023 report on international corruption reported that Ukraine has made significant progress taking on corruption, even during the challenges of war.

Wartime Ukraine climbed twelve places in the 2023 edition of this annual survey.

The report found that “Ukraine’s growth by three points is one of the best results over the past year in the [entire] world.”

Of course there are challenges, and conducting oversight of aid in a warzone is always hard—especially when we can’t access the front line.

At the outset of the conflict, U.S. personnel in Ukraine had to be evacuated—we all know this. Over the course of the next six months, U.S. agencies worked diligently to establish logistics hubs in partner nations to oversee the transfer of aid and equipment.

It is important to note that up until this conflict, end use monitoring of defense articles had only been executed in a peacetime environment, which meant that the U.S. government could conduct site visits and have greater access.

Our agencies conducting oversight of aid to Ukraine had to develop entirely new procedures for conducting this work in a hostile environment. And I commend them for this difficult work, which speaks to the commitment to oversight.

But let’s remember that Republican attacks on foreign aid aren’t just hurting our fight for democracy in Europe.

My friends in the majority also talk about issues around the border. And we, of course, haven’t had a single hearing on push factors that drive people to migrate. But we know that foreign aid and additional foreign aid would also have a huge impact on what is happening along the border and certainly to help the people of Mexico, Central America and South America. We should have a hearing that examines the root causes of our global problems — and work to remediate those.

Our humanitarian aid fights displacement by addressing these root causes. Poverty and climate change we know are also huge factors, and we look at migration happening, for example, in, for example Guatemala and Honduras, there are huge challenges that could also be addressed with the support from the United States and the world as it relates to humanitarian aid.

The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has been an enormous driver of folks coming to the border. We used to have thousands of folks from Venezuela come to the border, and now we’ve had in some years, hundreds of thousands of folks from Venezuela coming to the border.

In countries where criminal gangs may control the police or the government, our U.S. assistance is vital to also fight corruption and insecurity.

In Guatemala, for instance, we funded a U.N. Commission of independent prosecutors that helped prosecutors take on military death squads, take on rogue police officers, drug cartels, and even two presidents.

That commission helped cut homicides by 32%, dismantle 60 criminal networks, and catalyzed the indictment of 680 bad actors across the country. President Biden has fought to strengthen that commission even when he was Vice President. So, there’s a lot of work we can do around human aid.

I ask unanimous consent to introduce this report from the Washington Office on Latin America called “When the Dominoes Fall: Co-optation of the Justice System in Guatemala” into the record.

Just like in Ukraine, there are attacks by some on foreign aid that has harmed innocent people, weakened American values and harmed our national interest. Foreign aid is critical in our success as a country and national security interests as well.

And with that I yield back.

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