

Opening Statement
Rep. John F. Tierney, Ranking Member

Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations
Hearing on “Dawood National Military Hospital, Afghanistan: What Happened and What Went Wrong?”

July 24, 2012

Thank you, Chairman Chaffetz. And thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

I have long been concerned with issues of corruption and mismanagement of US taxpayer dollars in Afghanistan. In 2005, I co-authored legislation with then-Republican Congressman Jim Leach that led the way to the creation of the Commission of Wartime Contracting, which issued its final report last fall estimating up to \$60 billion in waste, fraud, and abuse of U.S. taxpayer funds in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As the former Chairman of this Subcommittee, I led multiple investigations into allegations of corruption in U.S. contracting related to the war in Afghanistan. These include investigations into the jet fuel contracts in Kyrgyzstan, a major transit hub for Afghanistan, and the primary Department of Defense logistics trucking contract in Afghanistan. Our investigation of the trucking contract found that contractors were making protection payments to our enemies with U.S. taxpayer dollars.

Corruption and mismanagement problems persist in Afghanistan, and it is important and necessary that our Subcommittee continue investigating these issues, especially with today's focus on the problems at the Dawood Military Hospital. The Subcommittee's investigation has uncovered evidence of rampant corruption in the pharmaceutical distribution system, widespread patient neglect, and potential contracting fraud that led patients to receive fake morphine that did little to relieve their pain.

Conditions at the hospital deteriorated to such an extent that one of the witnesses joining us today, Col. Fassl, sent an email to his colleagues re-counting the deplorable conditions at the hospital. Describing just one of the many problems he observed at the hospital, he wrote the following:

No hygiene capability for 6-months-NO-soap, bleach, and bacterial wipes. Human waste—blood, feces, urine and wound drainage are being collected, spilled in open buckets next to patients beds while at the same time food is being served.

These revelations are truly appalling. And although the Dawood hospital is not run by the United States, we do know that the U.S has invested at least \$185 million into the Afghan military healthcare system. For all the money we are spending, it is clear that we must do a better job training the Afghans to run their own military hospitals.

Our investigation has also revealed that the problems at the hospital were brought to light due to the hard work and courage of U.S. servicemembers serving in Afghanistan, and specifically, four of the witnesses sitting before us today. Due to their dedication and commitment, evidence of corruption and patient neglect were brought to the attention of senior military officials, the Department of Defense Inspector General, and now, this Subcommittee. While there is much work left to be done, the courage and persistence of these men has generated the necessary pressure to improve conditions at the hospital, forced the ouster of the Afghan Surgeon General, and led to a criminal investigation of the contractor who provided counterfeit morphine.

These are very serious issues, and I hope that in our election-year emphasis on everything political we do not become distracted from the question of how to help the Afghans stop the problems that led to the horrible conditions at Dawood. The Chairman has raised concerns about allegations that then-Commander, Lieutenant General William Caldwell, inappropriately interfered with this referral to the Inspector General. If true, that would be very concerning, regardless of whether his purpose was personal or political. These allegations are part of an ongoing DOD Inspector General investigation, and I look forward to reviewing that report when it is completed.

During today's hearing, I hope that we can focus on the problems of corruption and mismanagement at the hospital and within the Afghan military medical system. The Inspector General has completed an investigation into problems with the pharmaceutical distribution system that was certainly one of the causes of these problems. The Inspector General has recommended improvements, and the military and the Afghans have already implemented some changes. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about whether those changes have been sufficient and about the significant challenges that remain. Again, I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to give us the benefit of their experience and insight.

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