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Opening Statement Rep. John F. Tierney, Ranking Member

Subcommittee on National Security Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Hearing on "Status of U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan in Anticipation of the U.S. Troop Withdrawal"

March 13, 2013

Today's hearing is the third in a series of hearings held by the Full Committee and the Subcommittee on National Security in the 113th Congress on the challenges of administering and overseeing foreign aid in Afghanistan.

Today's hearing will focus on the civilian side of development efforts in Afghanistan in light of the planned drawdown of U.S. military forces. Mr. Chairman, the vast majority of foreign assistance in Afghanistan is not managed by USAID, but by the Defense Department. Since 2002, the vast majority—\$59 billion—is for the Defense Department's programs to train, equip, and sustain the Afghan National Security Forces. Even this year, when we plan to draw down many of our troops, we still plan to spend more than four times as much on Defense Department assistance programs than we will on civilian assistance programs.

USAID's share is still substantial—over \$15 billion invested since 2002. We must ensure that in Afghanistan, as in other high-risk locations, USAID is properly managing and accounting for how taxpayer dollars are being spent. This includes improving efforts to collect data, and monitor and evaluate program performance and outcomes. Assistant to the Administrator Sampler brings some significant experience from the field to the table—having lived in Kabul and traveled to Afghanistan or Pakistan over 60 times. I look forward to Mr. Sampler's testimony today on what USAID is doing and can still do to keep its personnel and its partners' personnel safe and to ensure accountability of U.S. taxpayer funds in Afghanistan.

This Subcommittee and the Full Committee have also taken a closer look at the Administration's policy of providing assistance directly to the Afghan government. A recent Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report raised serious concerns over USAID's decision to move forward with direct assistance at seven Afghan ministries despite external audits identifying many deficiencies at those ministries that were not corrected. While I understand that USAID takes a different view of the actual risk to taxpayer funds, it would be unfair to only focus on this report today in the absence of Inspector General John Sopko.

Nonetheless, I look forward to hearing more about how USAID is ensuring that direct assistance in Afghanistan is protected from waste, fraud, and abuse—especially given endemic corruption in Afghanistan.

At our Full Committee hearing nearly one year ago, Inspector General Sopko raised serious concerns that the drawdown of the U.S. military will limit the ability of U.S. personnel to directly oversee projects both because of security concerns and because movement can only be supported within one-hour round trip of a medical facility. This could limit access to some reconstruction sites, including the \$75 million USAID-funded Kajaki Dam project. Although the IGs are not here today, I look forward to hearing whether the Government Accountability Office has encountered similar access challenges.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, USAID operates in some of the most challenging parts of the world, including Pakistan, Iraq, and South Sudan. And in these locations, USAID does not depend on the U.S. military either for their personnel's security or to facilitate direct oversight of their projects.

There are currently 34,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. By the end of this year, there will be 12,000, 10,000, or perhaps 8,000 troops remaining for the train and equip mission as well as limited counterterrorism operations. Yet, conditions on the ground—namely, President Karzai's refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement—has led President Obama to recently ask our military to consider a complete withdrawal by the end of the year.

I hope that today's hearing will be the beginning of additional hearings focusing on the Administration's policy regarding a continued troop presence. One line of questioning will certainly be: "If the 'zero option' is chosen, or if relatively few troops are maintained in Afghanistan, will any portion of them be utilized to ensure oversight of USAID programs? Are they necessary or desirable for such tasks? What are other options to ensure the safe oversight of USAID projects and spending?"

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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