

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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Opening Statement

Jeff Flake
Ranking Member
National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee

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

March 26, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today’s hearing is especially important and timely. I look forward to an interesting discussion.

As are all aware, the Afghanistan conflict is now in its eighth year. During this time, we have seen both progress and regress.

In the wake of the 2001 invasion, we saw significant security gains. The Taliban network was largely disrupted and Al Qaeda fled to the hills. A short while later, we saw Afghans democratically elect a president. In a rather swift timeframe, our military and diplomatic efforts seemed to be paying off.

Since 2006, however, progress has deteriorated. Having visited in 2004, and again this past December, I can say the contrast is stark. As our witnesses will describe, security has declined and the Taliban is regrouping. This, of course, raises serious concern that Al Qaeda may be resurging as well.

With an estimated 1,400 NGOs operating in Afghanistan, nearly 38,000 U.S. troops on the ground, and billions spent, we need to be getting it right.

It is time for a fresh look at our strategy.

Since taking office, President Obama seems to have shifted policy in Afghanistan. On February 17, he ordered 17,000 additional troops be sent there. This will bring the total number of U.S. troops to approximately 55,000, the largest amount ever deployed in that country.

After having ordered these troops to combat, however, the President will receive the results of a high-level review of U.S. policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. It seems that following the decision to dispatch additional troops, the Administration will determine what its policy will be.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that we will have a hearing with Administration officials soon after the plan is released.

Today we will hear from what I believe is among the most well-qualified panels assembled on Afghanistan strategy in a long time.

Dr. Kagan, in particular, has just returned from eight days on the ground in Afghanistan. With the encouragement and support of General David Petraeus, Dr. Kagan and the other experts in his party were able to travel widely and observe many aspects of ongoing operations. He has published a lengthy review of his findings, and I look forward to hearing his testimony today.

But, Mr. Chairman, this Committee needs to hear from the Administration, also.

You and I have been contacted privately by those involved in the strategic review. Now that it has been completed, I believe senior leaders should come before us in a public forum to explain the details of their proposal.

I hope we can work together to arrange such a hearing.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for your efforts in organizing this hearing. I look forward to our witnesses' testimony.