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**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**  
**“Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding a Complex Threat Environment”**

**March 4, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This hearing provides an excellent opportunity to hear from non-governmental witnesses concerning the threats we face in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I look forward to their testimony and a productive discourse about a successful U.S. policy in the region.

Our nation has spent billions in Afghanistan since 2001 and we have seen significant progress. However, security has declined as the Taliban and other militant groups have reorganized. As a result, there were 155 combat-related U.S. deaths in Afghanistan in 2008. This is the most since American operations began in 2001. Clearly, we must reassess our strategy.

In Pakistan, the U.S. continues to spend billions in coalition support funding. Because this effort has yielded limited success, it is necessary to also question whether the costs of this policy outweigh the benefits. It seems the U.S. strategy in Pakistan must also be reevaluated.

Since taking office, President Obama has already 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.

If the President has ordered thousands of troops to Afghanistan without first having developed a clear policy and strategy, then this hearing should be less about understanding the enemy and more about understanding the Administration’s approach.

The United States continues to expend billions for operations in Afghanistan. Congress allocated billions in the Defense appropriations bill last fall, and expects to receive a Supplemental request for billions more in April. We must ensure that, in the wake of unprecedented deficit spending, we are executing the right strategy in a fiscally responsible manner. More importantly, we must carefully outline this strategy before sending troops into harm's way.

Noticeably absent from this hearing, again, is a representative of the Administration to describe, who and what it has determined the enemy to be. If this hearing is aimed at a public discourse about "effective solutions," then the Administration should be a part of the discussion.

As the war unfolds, this Subcommittee must continue aggressive oversight of our civilian and military efforts. I urge my colleagues to use these opportunities to compel better planning and oversight of this theater and ensure that the Administration carefully outlines a winning strategy *before* sending more troops into harm's way.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very important hearing today. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.