Chairman Jason Chaffetz
Opening Statement
Kabul Embassy Hearing
July 9, 2015

Keeping Americans safe who work in Foreign Service in Kabul, Afghanistan is a constant challenge. Just last week, Taliban militants attacked a NATO convoy just 500 yards from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

The week before, militants stormed the Afghan parliament in Kabul in broad daylight in what appears to be a coordinated attack.

These incidents make clear we have to ensure our brave men and women serving in these hostile environments are safe. And one of the best ways to ensure their safety is to provide secure facilities for them to perform their diplomatic missions.

Due to mismanagement by the State Department, however, that is not happening in Kabul. As a result, the American diplomatic staff in Afghanistan are being exposed to unnecessary danger.

Last July, the Government Accountability Office reviewed the construction of the Kabul embassy facility and found the State Department failed to properly acknowledge known risks.

These known risks included:

- The award of a contract for work before the contract site was acquired;
- An unrealistic schedule for the work to be completed under;
- Changes in the number of staff at the complex; and
- Changes in the design of the building and security requirements.

As a result these failures, construction would take more time and cost more money, leaving Embassy staff in less secure, temporarily facilities. In May, GAO once again reviewed the construction of the new Embassy complex in Kabul. And once again, the review identified a number of significant – but preventable – problems.

This lack of planning by the State Department resulted in cost overruns and delays.

Construction is now projected to come in at least 27 percent over budget and more than three years behind schedule. The project was originally expected to cost $625 million. It is now estimated to cost at least $792 million.

Because the State Department failed to properly plan for the project, it is continuing to negotiate with its contractor. So the current cost overruns could become much larger.

One of the factors causing these delays and cost overruns is the Department's failure to follow its own directive to have a strategic facilities plan.

As its name implies, a strategic facilities plan outlines how a particular facility will be developed and used. The need for a strategic facilities plan is especially critical for facilities like Kabul, where there is a high turnover in personnel.

The State Department recently rescinded the requirement to development a strategic plan for *any* facility, which was a requirement that had been in place since 1990. So because of the State Department's poor planning, the use of temporary facilities, where Americans must live and work, will continue indefinitely in Kabul.

In fact, amazingly, the State Department recently requested an additional $124 million for *temporary* facilities.

It is unclear why State didn't do a better job planning for permanent and secure buildings, which resulted in wasting taxpayer dollars on temporary facilities.

Not only does State not properly plan for permanent facilities, it also has no standards for temporary facilities. The State Department's own actions in Kabul make clear how critical such standards are.

In its FY 2008 budget request, State expressed to Congress concerns about the threat to the Kabul facility posed by incoming weapons fire.

However, as GAO pointed out "the only security protection measure specified in the 2009 contract for the temporary **housing** was *shatter-resistant window film*."

I'm no expert, but I don't think "shatter-resistant" windows can stop a bullet, or worse, a grenade.

In contrast, State contracted for the temporary **offices** to have a higher level of security and ballistic protection than the temporary housing it built. This means that employees were safer working 24-hours a day than returning to their temporary housing.

The lesson here is clear: when there are no standards or guidance, the results are inconsistent and Americans are unsafe.

We have to do a better job of getting our folks into the safer new facility as soon as possible without incurring additional cost overruns.

The need to get this right is absolutely urgent.