

**The Honorable Steve Chabot, Chairman
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia**

**“Assessing U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities and Needs Amidst Economic
Challenges in South Asia”**

May 16, 2012

The purpose of this hearing is to follow up on the recent Full Committee hearing with the Secretary of State and the USAID Administrator. Last week we heard from Administration officials on the Middle East component of the fiscal year 2013 budget and this week we will focus on the South Asia component which includes, notably, Afghanistan.

Just over a year ago this Subcommittee heard testimony from the Administration on our programming in Afghanistan and although much has changed on the ground since then, our policy has not. Although the details continue to change, the fundamental underlying policy remains the same, and it is driven by one key objective: transition by the end of 2014 by any means necessary. In the president’s recent speech at Bagram airbase, President Obama tried to lay out what he believes is the path forward. Reading that speech, however, it seems to me that it was more of a victory lap than a statement of strategy or objectives. Indeed, there is an inherent tension in President Obama’s remarks. On the one hand, he makes very clear that our objective is to deny al Qaeda a safe haven—nothing more. On the other hand, he acknowledges how tenuous the gains we have made are and that if, as he says, we do not offer “Afghanistan the opportunity to stabilize ... our gains could be lost, and al-Qaida could establish itself once more.”

While the much-celebrated recently-signed Strategic Partnership Agreement is certainly a move in the right direction, it is more of a broad commitment toward a similar future than a roadmap of how to get there. Clearly in order sustain these goals we must, as President Obama notes, work to stabilize Afghanistan. But what does a stable Afghanistan entail? And, as important, how do we and the Afghans plan to get there? We now have this agreement, but we have no specifics. We have the transition plan on the ground, but handing the keys over is hardly in and of itself a measure of success. How do our aid programs fit into our overall political strategy? We have a reconciliation process, but the process is stalled and, by all reasonable assessments, is going nowhere. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recently noted, “If you negotiate while your forces are withdrawing, you’re not in a great negotiating position.”

I hope our witnesses will explain today what kind of Afghanistan we want to see post-2014 and how the policies that are being implemented get us there. I will confess that my fear is that the Administration has no comprehensive plan, at least not on the civilian side. Before we start patting ourselves on the back too much over the Strategic Partnership Agreement we should remember that shared intent is not shared policy; the devil, as they say, is in the details.

Just to south, in Pakistan, continued sanctuary offered to insurgents has been one of our largest challenges on the ground and, regrettably, I fear it will not disappear anytime soon. To that point, the Department of Defense's most recent report to Congress notes flatly that, "The Taliban insurgency and its al Qaeda affiliates still operate with impunity from sanctuaries in Pakistan" which "remain the most critical threat" to the U.S.-led effort in Afghanistan. At its core, Pakistani sanctuary is really a symptom of a larger problem: Our strategic objectives in Afghanistan are fundamentally incompatible with Pakistan's. While we seek a sovereign and independent Afghanistan, Islamabad vies for a neighbor that can be easily influenced and controlled. And as serious of a threat as Pakistani-based insurgent groups pose now, they have the potential to spiral post-2014 and place Afghanistan once more in the center of a dangerous regional conflict. I wish this were the only challenge in our bilateral relationship with Pakistan, but the 14-point guidelines approved by Pakistan's parliamentary review of the country's relationship with the U.S. ensures that more bumps are surely ahead, particularly as we approach transition in Afghanistan. I hope the Administration is considering how our policy should adjust to accommodate a shift in our interests vis-à-vis Pakistan post-2014.

To the south east of Pakistan things happily look significantly better. The U.S.-India relationship has come a long way in the past 20 years. The U.S. and India are united not only by shared interests, but by shared values, such as a belief in democracy. And as one of India's leading trade and investment partners, the United States strongly supports New Delhi's economic reforms and strongly encourages the Indian government to continue along this path. It's no secret, however that to date the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement hasn't met U.S. commercial expectations due to the nuclear liability law passed by the Indian parliament which essentially shuts-out U.S. companies. I hope our witnesses here today will discuss what actions are being taken to resolve this.

And finally, I hope our witnesses will address the status of post-conflict reconciliation in Sri Lanka. I had the opportunity to travel to Sri Lanka recently and I am particularly interested in how Colombo is building on the recommendations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission.

Unlike in some places, U.S. national security interests in South Asia are both dire and immediate. As we approach what will be a critical time of transition in the region, I hope the Administration crafts its policy with a careful eye toward the future in order to sustain the gains that have been so hard-won.