

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

“2014 and Beyond: U.S. Policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, Part I”

November 3, 2011

The Subcommittee will come to order. Good afternoon. I want to welcome all of my colleagues to this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia.

One week ago, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs heard the testimony of Secretary of State Clinton on the Administration’s policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the details continue to change, the fundamental underlying policy remains the same, and it is driven by one key objective: withdrawal by the end of 2014.

Unfortunately, although the 2014 withdrawal date may be politically expedient, it is strategically risky. The counterinsurgency strategy that President Obama announced at West Point in December 2009 depends on two key objectives: providing population-centric security to create the space for governance and an enduring commitment to fighting the insurgents to ensure that there is no doubt that they will ultimately lose. Both of these are undermined by setting and, more importantly, stating, a withdrawal date. If Afghans—and regional actors—do not believe we are committed to their safety then they are likely to accommodate insurgents in an attempt to hedge their bets in advance of our anticipated departure. Similarly, if the insurgents believe that we will depart by a certain date they will likely be confident in their ultimate victory. This last point is especially important. Reconciliation—which is the Administration’s current means of bridging the gap between the status quo and the 2014 withdrawal date—is, if at all possible, only so if the insurgents face certain defeat. 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 will confess that trying to make sense of the Administration’s policy calls to mind Yogi Berra’s famous admonition that “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” This is what we appear to be doing, which is to say that it is not clear to me what we are doing. The Administration initially refrained from a strict counterterrorism strategy and opted instead for a more robust counterinsurgency campaign. It has not, however, allocated enough time, resources, or energy to properly implement this policy; it appears to lack what Ambassador Crocker has referred to as “strategic patience.” Transition has begun, yet it is taking place under conditions that have yet to be defined alongside inconclusive information on the current conditions. In short, it is unclear what we are doing, when we are doing it, how we are doing it, or even what we are trying to accomplish beyond withdrawal as soon as possible. As one reporter recently noted, the current “strategy is an attempt to fold disparate policy elements into a comprehensive package as the Administration tries to fashion an exit that will not leave Afghanistan open to civil war or the

reestablishment of terrorist bases.” Indeed, it appears as though the Administration is at best slouching toward the door instead of running to it.

The situation in which the Administration finds itself is nothing short of a strategic mess. Sound strategic thinking dictates that you first define your objective and then formulate your policy to achieve it. The current policy, however, has it backwards: Until 2014 we will try everything possible to salvage something that can be called victory because withdrawal by 2014 appears to be the Administration's sole objective. The result is strategic race to the bottom in which objectives are stretched and sliced to fit the means that the Administration is willing to employ on any given day.

And then there is Pakistan. As I am sure our witnesses will explain, the continued sanctuary offered to insurgents on the Pakistani side of the Afghan border short-circuits any gains that we are able to make against key insurgent groups and renders them unsustainable. And although Secretary Clinton testified that the Administration has made clear to the Pakistanis that the time has come for this shelter to cease, I remain skeptical; these warnings have been issued for years to no avail. I am also very concerned about the Administration's latest plan which involves using the Pakistani Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to reach out to insurgents. Although it may make sense in the context of reconciliation, it risks rewarding the very elements which continue to be responsible for sheltering insurgents who kill Americans and Afghans alike. None of this, of course, even begins to address the implications of this policy for India which has been, continues to be, and I hope will remain a close ally and friend of the U.S.

Unlike in some places, U.S. national security interests in South Asia are both dire and immediate. If we leave Afghanistan too soon, the odds are high that it will once again devolve into a state of affairs in which terrorists can once again thrive. If that is the case I fear we may find ourselves not discussing our departure from Afghanistan, but our return.