

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Afghanistan 2014: Year of Transition”
December 11, 2013**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

“I have been focused on Afghanistan since before 9/11, warning of an emerging terrorist sanctuary there. Today, the Committee recognizes the tremendous sacrifices made by our troops and their families so that America is safe from the type of attack that Osama bin Laden launched from Afghanistan. Next year, the Administration plans to transition from combat operations to an “advise and assist role. We need a workable and realistic transition plan in place.

Last month, a bi-partisan Committee delegation, led by Representative Adam Kinzinger, and joined by Representatives Scott Perry and Juan Vargas, travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan. These Members collected information useful to the Committee, so I thank them for their important oversight work. I also want to recognize the Committee’s military advisor, Colonel Andrea Thompson, who has served tours in Afghanistan, and organized their trip.

I am concerned that the Administration has not adequately defined a mission in Afghanistan. U.S. troop strength will drop to 34,000 in two months, and pending a Bilateral Security Agreement, these numbers will drop much lower. The remaining troops will have a limited role, as they should. But what will be our objective? What constitutes success?

Insufficient planning for this transition could put American lives at risk. At present, it is questionable whether our diplomatic facilities are sufficiently equipped – physically and staffing-wise – to protect U.S. personnel. This danger will only increase as more troops withdraw, which transition planners better figure out.

Unfortunately, endemic corruption in Afghanistan places our aid programs at constant risk of waste, fraud, and abuse. Despite years of rule-of-law training, the Afghan government has few workable safeguards in place to prevent the misuse of U.S. aid money.

Widespread corruption also threatens the presidential and provincial elections, set for next April. Free and fair elections are essential to establishing a stable Afghan government capable of preventing Taliban-induced chaos. A repeat of the widespread election fraud seen in 2009 would almost certainly undermine Afghans’ faith in their government, dangerously setting back the country.

Corruption hinders Afghanistan’s economy. The country’s mining sector could tap deposits of critical industrial metals by attracting more foreign investment. That won’t happen with its off-the-charts corruption.

On the security front, Pakistan's military and security service continue to complicate matters, by supporting the Taliban. Pakistan is a double-dealer, paying lip service to cooperation with the U.S., while simultaneously undermining our primary objective of bringing Afghanistan under the control of a democratically-elected government.

Lastly, Iran continues to support the Taliban, while utilizing Afghanistan's banking system to circumvent U.S. and international sanctions. Iran will intensify its meddling during the transition, at our expense. Just yesterday, it was announced that President Karzai had agreed to a "long-term friendship and cooperation pact" with Iran. We need a strategy to counter this.

Afghans will determine their future, not us. What we can do is help them develop a stable and reasonably democratic government, one respectful of universally-recognized human rights. That's what most Afghans want, it's in our interests, and it's what our sacrifices demand we strive for."