

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**  
**MENA Joint Subcommittee Hearing entitled: U.S. Counternarcotics Operations in**  
**Afghanistan**  
**Wednesday, February 5, 2014**

Since fiscal year 2002, the U.S. has appropriated almost 7 ½ billion dollars for counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. This funding includes over 4 billion for the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), nearly 3 billion for the Department of Defense's Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities, and just over 200 million for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

This amounts to about 7% of the 102 billion dollars the U.S. has appropriated for relief and reconstruction in Afghanistan over that period of time. Last year alone, we allocated nearly 1 billion dollars toward these counternarcotics efforts.

This is a significant amount of U.S. taxpayer money, and it is extremely important that this Subcommittee continue to conduct its oversight role to ensure that we are achieving our goals and objectives and that this money is being properly spent.

Yet despite all of this money being spent, 2013 was a record breaking year in terms of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan produced over 80 % of the world's opium last year, and the illegal drug trade is a contributing factor to many of the major challenges facing Afghanistan and the U.S.

The drug trade helps to: generate 100s of millions of dollars for the Taliban and other extremist groups every year; create an increase in corruption; and create a very serious public health challenge in Afghanistan as more and more Afghans get addicted to the readily available drugs.

The narco-terrorism connection is particularly troubling given the vast sums of money extremist groups can extract from the drug trade and to fund terrorist activities against the United States and our interests worldwide. And the money drug trafficking generates permeates its way through all levels of government, as corruption and drug trafficking in Afghanistan go hand in hand.

Last May, I led a CODEL to Afghanistan – and had Foreign Affairs Committee colleagues Mr. Kennedy and Dr. Bera along - and we had the opportunity to see firsthand the work that the INL, DoD and the DEA are doing on the counternarcotics front, and get briefed by the folks on the ground about the current situation. We also visited the DEA Center in Afghanistan, and it is quite impressive to see their operations and how the programs are run.

I commend those brave men and women for doing their absolute best to fight this very serious problem with their resources. The amount of capacity building, specialty training and information sharing that INL, DoD and DEA have done is a testament to their commitment to aggressively fight this threat.

And though there have been great strides made, I remain worried about the future of counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan as we approach the 2014 withdrawal, with even greater uncertainty. All of our counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan to this point have relied heavily on a robust U.S. military presence. To add insult to injury, Karzai has not been willing to provide vital resources to help the eradication teams in Afghanistan.

As a result of the U.S. drawdown, many of our operations have had to be scaled back and we have reduced our counternarcotics presence in Afghanistan in conjunction with the dwindling number of troops. And now with the post-2014 U.S. footprint still in doubt, we are making it even more difficult for these agencies that will have to make corresponding decreases in their enduring presence and to make adjustments to their operations.

I'm concerned that because DEA personnel is being scaled back by over 70%, our counternarcotics efforts will be undermined and will not be successful. As Ambassador Brownfield notes in his testimony – these counternarcotics efforts do not take place in a vacuum.

Addressing the drug issue in Afghanistan is a key part of our overall strategy for Afghanistan and for the overall war on terror. So much attention has been given to the Bilateral Security Agreement, the upcoming elections in April, and the mercurial nature of Karzai, but we must not lose sight of the counternarcotics threat that poses a direct threat to our national security and regional stability.