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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**  
Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing:  
“U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan”  
June 20, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

“Afghanistan has been at war since 1979. The human suffering has been great. Real threats to U.S. national security have followed.

As a result, the U.S. has had no choice but to engage in Afghanistan. First, we helped counter the brutal Soviet invasion, and then we helped dislodge the Taliban and combat Al Qaeda after the September 11 attacks. Afghanistan has been called ‘America’s Longest War.’ Thousands of Americans have lost their lives. We have spent hundreds of billions.

This investment aims to achieve a stable Afghanistan that does not harbor international terrorists. Should the Afghan government fail, the vacuum surely would be filled. ISIS and Iran would be among those who benefit.

So today we’ll ask, ‘Where should we go from here?’

We currently have 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. This is dramatically down from a high of 100,000 in 2011. Their current focus is training Afghan security forces and counterterrorism, and there has been some success. Fortunately, many allies are still with us. But Afghans need the ability and also the will to fight for their own country.

Last week, there was a brief ceasefire and renewed Afghan government outreach to the Taliban, which the administration endorsed. Yet the Taliban continues the fight and has rejected all offers to enter into negotiations with the internationally recognized and backed Afghan government. This conflict does need a sustainable political resolution of some sort that leads to a credible, competent Afghan government.

The administration moved things in the right direction by scrapping restrictive rules of engagement that had hamstrung U.S. forces. It dropped a politically driven timeline for our engagement, established by the Obama administration. It’s putting more pressure on Pakistan, which aids and abets the Taliban and other jihadist groups. And Taliban finances are being targeted.

These are good steps, but it's unclear if they'll change the fundamentals that have frustrated an acceptable resolution for so long.

After all these years, what do we really know about the Taliban? How fragmented is it? Can it ever be brought into a durable political settlement? Would Pakistan, or Russia and Iran, both increasingly engaged with the Taliban, sabotage any settlement?

We should be proud of our many contributions to development in Afghanistan, including dramatically expanding education and the cause of women, despite rampant corruption. I've met with some of these women. Their stories are incredibly inspiring.

But frankly, in other ways, we've been treading water. While leaving today would do more harm than good, our substantial military and development commitment to Afghanistan cannot be open-ended. We need to see more progress.”