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HEARING ON
ISLAMIST MILITANT THREATS TO EURASIA

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Chairman Rohrabacher, thank you for holding this timely hearing on “Islamic Militant Threats to Eurasia.”

This is our first hearing on the Subcommittee together, and I would like to note that I very much look forward to working with you and all the members of this subcommittee.

The US relationship with Europe and Eurasia are critically important to both our economy and security, so I am certain that there will be no shortage of interesting topics to review in the coming years.

In regard to today’s hearing, as the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan prepares to draw down in 2014, the question of stability and security in Central Asia is crucially important, not only for the region, but also for US policy.

I believe that we face an immensely complex, yet long overdue task in bringing our troops home safely, and we must further work with our allies to mitigate potential instability and spillover effects of the drawdown to neighboring countries.

Needless to say, even through the expected drawdown, I believe that Afghanistan will remain one of our central international challenges.

To that effect, Central Asia will play a crucial role in retrograde operations.

It has been no simple task for these Nations to support the United States through Operation Enduring Freedom and beyond. They are concerned with domestic unrest and rising extremism within their own borders. But ultimately, they too have much to gain from a sustained partnership with the US.

At the forefront of these benefits rests the Administration’s vision of expanding the Northern Distribution Network into a viable conduit for inter-regional trade between Central Asian states and the wider, global community.

I look forward to hearing more about this plan from Assistant Secretary Blake.

Additionally, I believe US engagement provides Central Asian states with an opportunity to strengthen respective governance structures and rule of law, so that the full economic potential of this part of the world can be realized.

Currently, the US faces a serious policy dilemma in how some of the governments have chosen to weed extremists or militants out through authoritarian rule. As we have seen in countless examples, most recently, throughout the Arab World, authoritarianism breeds resentment, resistance, and at times violent insurgencies.

This is a vicious cycle, and we have to figure out a way to work with our Central Asian partners to break it.

I particularly want to point out that labeling any form of dissent or opposition to current governments as “terrorism” is a particularly unhelpful approach. There is a very real terrorist threat within the region, and blurring lines and definitions will only serve to aid recruitment and increase violence.

I am troubled by the lack of freedom of expression and information in the Central Asian republics. On a recent trip to the region, members of a Congressional delegation were not able to access the websites of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, EurasiaNet, Freedom House, Transparency International, Amnesty International, and a host of other acclaimed, international information sources.

In this regard, I would suggest that U.S. security assistance to the region should be reviewed under this context, and further aid should be contingent upon further democratic improvement.

If political, economic and human rights reforms do not take place in the Central Asian republics, I fear that the region will not be able to attract investments or create jobs needed to secure stability. This in turn increases the potential of non-viable, un-governable or illegitimate states.

The US and Central Asia share a mutual interest in the security of the region. It is important that we work together on these goals.

I look forward to hearing our distinguished witnesses’ take on these issues, and I want to thank Assistant Secretary Blake and Deputy Coordinator Siberell for participating today. Secretary Blake, I know that you were just testifying at this Committee yesterday after returning from the region last week, so I particularly appreciate your vigor. Thank you for being here.

I yield back my time.