

# U.S. POLICY TOWARD AFGHANISTAN

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BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION

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## U.S. POLICY TOWARD AFGHANISTAN

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, 2018

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. This hearing on U.S. policy toward Afghanistan will come to order.

Afghanistan has been at war since 1979. The human suffering has been horrendous. 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 of dollars.

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 the ayatollah would be among those who would benefit. So today we will 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 cease fire 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 not need a sustainable political resolution of some sort that is going to fall apart. What it needs is a well-thought through sustainable situation that will hold for the people of Afghanistan and that leads to a credible competent Afghan Government.

And the administration moved these things in the right direction by scrapping restrictive rules of engagement that had hamstrung U.S. forces. It dropped a politically-driven time line for our engagement established by the previous 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 will 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. The girls can now go to schools. That was prohibited, of course, under the Taliban. I've talked to teachers who've had the soles of their feet lashed when they were caught teaching girls.

The stories of these girls are incredibly inspiring. The stories of women who are now part of the government in Afghanistan are 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. And with that, if we have—our ranking member is not with us yet but he'll make his statement, Ambassador Wells, after your opening statement.

So this morning, I am pleased to welcome Alice Wells, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs to the committee.

Ambassador Alice G. Wells has been serving as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs since June 2017.

She is a career Foreign Service officer and she has previously served as the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Jordan.

She has held numerous positions within the Department of State and has extensive experience in South and Central Asia, and we very much appreciate her being with us today.

Without objection, the witness' full prepared statement is going to be made part of the record. Members are going to have 5 calendar days to submit any statements or questions or extraneous material for the record.

And I'll ask Ambassador Wells if she would summarize her remarks and then afterwards we will go to questions.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ALICE G. WELLS, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Ambassador WELLS. Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel, thank you for inviting me to appear today to discuss the administration's strategy in Afghanistan.

This is a timely hearing. Just last week, a cease fire—the first in 17 years—brought peace to Afghanistan during the period of Eid and, like many Americans, I was struck by the images of Afghan soldiers and Taliban praying together, side by side.

If Afghan troops and Taliban foot soldiers can pray together, then the Afghan people have every reason to believe that their leaders can come together and negotiate an end to this war.

Helping to jumpstart an Afghan peace process is among Secretary Pompeo's highest priorities and has been my primary focus since assuming responsibility for this account 1 year ago.

The President's South Asia strategy, announced last August, is making a difference. Its conditions-based approach has signaled to the Taliban that they cannot win on the battlefield, and has provided President Ghani with renewed confidence to pursue a negotiated political settlement.

His February 2018 invitation to the Taliban to enter into a peace process without preconditions as unprecedented. Equally unprecedented was President Ghani's announcement of the temporary cease fire for the weeks surrounding the Eid holidays.

The national outpouring of relief and joy last weekend was unlike anything Afghanistan has seen. Taliban fighters wandered the streets of the cities. They took selfies with Afghan soldiers.

The sampled Eid treats with Afghan citizens and they worshiped alongside those they had been exchanging fire with just a few days earlier.

For many Afghans, Taliban and pro-government alike, it was an exhilarating first taste of what peace might look like.

The United States has made clear that we are prepared to support, facilitate, and participate in direct negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

We will support all Afghan stakeholders as they work to reach a mutually agreeable negotiated settlement that ends the conflict and ensures Afghanistan is never again used as a safe haven for terrorist groups.

Our desired outcomes for any peace process are clear and have not changed. The Taliban must renounce violence, break ties with al-Qaeda, and accept the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.

Although the Taliban and ISIS Khorasan remain potent enemies, the South Asia strategy is having an impact on the battlefield. With tactical level support from U.S. military advisors, the Afghan security forces have slowed the Taliban's momentum.

Improved air support, a generational shift in leadership, and a doubling of the size of special forces are creating conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace.

Alongside our military campaign we are working with our partners, especially in the Gulf, to help strangle the Taliban's illicit revenue from foreign sources and narcotics trafficking.

We are supporting the Afghan Government's outreach to the global Muslim community to delegitimize the religious underpinnings of the Taliban's violent campaign and we are also calling on Afghanistan's neighbors, especially Pakistan, to take additional steps in support of peace.

Despite some positive indicators, we have not yet seen Pakistan take the sustained or the decisive steps that we believe it should pursue, including arresting or expelling Taliban elements who will not come to the negotiating table.

We are also encouraging the Afghan Government reforms in a bid to further sap the insurgency of support. Upcoming Afghan elections for Parliament in October and for President in early 2019 must be timely, transparent, and credible.

We are providing targeted assistance to Afghan electoral institutions to assist with voter registration and reduce electoral fraud. More than 6 million Afghans have registered to vote and more than 5,000 candidates will be standing for public office.

President Ghani is an economic reformer, but Afghanistan still ranks near the bottom in Transparency International's rankings. There has been some institutional progress, including the establishment of an anti-corruption justice center.

But progress has been slow. However, there have been bright spots as well. Over the last year, the Afghan Government has improved its fiscal performance and is funding a greater share of its budget.

The U.S. share of pledged donor support has dropped from about 50 percent in 2012 to 25 percent today. The Afghan people who face the deadly toll of this war every day understand the need for peace and so too do the thousands of U.S. personnel working to implement the administration's strategy.

As I noted earlier, the key questions remains: Will the Taliban join the peace process and make the compromises necessary to end the war?

We are prepared to test this proposition.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee. Congress' support is crucial to our strategic progress and I look forward to addressing your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Wells follows:]

**Statement for the Record by Ambassador Alice G. Wells  
Senior Bureau Official for South and Central Asian Affairs  
Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Wednesday, June 20, 2018, 10:00 a.m.**

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel – thank you for inviting me to appear here today to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Thousands of U.S. service–members, diplomats, and development specialists are working every day alongside our Afghan and international partners to achieve our strategic objective of a more stable and secure Afghanistan that is never again a platform for terrorists to plan and execute attacks against the United States.

It has been almost a year since I was asked to lead our diplomatic efforts. Over the course of this year, I have seen the President’s South Asia Strategy make a difference. Afghan security forces are now fighting with renewed confidence and are slowing the Taliban’s momentum. Pakistan is on notice that we expect its unequivocal cooperation ending sanctuaries that the Taliban have enjoyed since the remnants of their toppled regime fled into Pakistan in 2001. And, for the first time, a ceasefire brought peace to Afghanistan during the period of Eid, with Afghan soldiers and Taliban praying together, side-by-side. If Afghan troops and Taliban foot-soldiers can pray together, then the Afghan people have every reason to believe that their leaders can come together and negotiate an end to this war. Achieving progress toward this goal is among our highest diplomatic priorities and I want to take this opportunity to update you on our efforts.

**Jumpstarting an Afghan Peace Process**

The Administration’s conditions-based South Asia Strategy ensures the Taliban cannot win on the battlefield. But it recognizes that a resolution to the conflict will be through a negotiated political settlement. Our desired outcomes for any peace process are clear and have not changed. The Taliban must renounce violence, break ties with al-Qaida, and accept the Afghan Constitution – including its protections for women and minorities.

The path to achieving these outcomes will likely be filled with obstacles and unanticipated setbacks. Nevertheless, after more than 16 years of war, we see a real opportunity this year to start an Afghan peace process that could lead to a durable settlement of the conflict. Such a settlement would help secure vital U.S. interests and ultimately reduce the costs associated with our long-term engagement in Afghanistan.

The basis for our cautious optimism starts with the Afghan government, which under President Ghani's strong leadership is doing everything possible to signal its openness to a dialogue with the Taliban. In February 2018, President Ghani invited the Taliban to enter into a peace process without preconditions – an unprecedented gesture by the Afghan government. More recently, President Ghani took another unprecedented step and announced a temporary ceasefire in offensive operations against the Taliban for the week surrounding the Eid holidays. The Taliban responded with a three-day ceasefire. This was the first national ceasefire in the last 17 years of the Afghan conflict, and the national outpouring of relief and joy this past weekend was unlike anything Afghanistan has seen in many years. Taliban fighters wandered the streets of major cities, leaving their weapons at the gates. They took selfies with Afghan soldiers, sampled Eid treats with Afghan citizens, and worshipped in mosques alongside those they had been exchanging fire with the previous week. For many Afghans, Taliban and pro-government alike, it was an exhilarating first taste of what peace might look like.

Ghani's bold move to reduce violence came on the heels of three historic religious edicts ("fatwa"). The first was a fatwa issued in 2017 by leading Pakistani clerics that declared suicide attacks to be forbidden under Islam and reserving to the state the authority to declare jihad. Then in May of this year, Islamic scholars from Indonesia, Pakistan and Afghanistan issued a trilateral declaration calling for peace in Afghanistan and reiterating that suicide attacks are contrary to Islam. Finally, this month, roughly 2,000 Afghan religious leaders gathered in Kabul and issued a fatwa with the same themes and calling for intra-Afghan peace. These scholars are adding their powerful voice to the message of countless ordinary Afghans who are increasingly demanding that their political leaders set aside longstanding differences and come together in pursuit of peace.

The United States has long held that Afghans must ultimately determine their own future and that a peace deal cannot be dictated by outside powers. As President Trump emphasized when announcing our South Asia Strategy, "We are a partner and a friend, but we will not dictate to the Afghan people how to live, or how to govern their own complex society." Nonetheless, this Administration also recognizes the decisive role that American leadership can have in catalyzing progress toward a peace agreement. With Secretary Pompeo's energetic leadership, we are reinvigorating U.S. diplomatic efforts to support an intra-Afghan peace process.

In the past four months, the United States and 28 other countries have endorsed President Ghani's peace vision. Ambassador Bass and his team in Kabul are lending support to Afghan-led efforts to extend the recent ceasefire, while our diplomats in other capitals are pressing influential international partners to publicly support it. The United States has made clear that we are prepared to support, facilitate, and participate in direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. We will support the government and all Afghan stakeholders as they work to reach a mutually agreeable negotiated settlement that ends the conflict and ensures Afghanistan is never again used as a safe haven for terrorist groups.

Recently, there have been signs that the Taliban's Pakistan-based leaders are debating the merits of joining a peace process; however, the group has not responded to President Ghani's offer of unconditional talks. We are pursuing a multi-track strategy to make clear to the Taliban that negotiations are their best option. The strategy has a number of distinct lines of effort quite apart from the military effort. These include a diplomatic effort to rally regional support for the Afghan Government and isolate the Taliban, and a financial component designed to eliminate the Taliban's ability to raise funds from donors and from narcotics trafficking. We are also working to end the sanctuary that the Taliban have enjoyed for decades in Pakistan and to encourage fighting elements within the Taliban to consider local arrangements to de-escalate the levels of violence.

I want to focus on four key areas where we are working to help bolster prospects for an eventual settlement of the conflict.

**First, we are supporting Afghan efforts to reduce violence and protect a peace process from spoilers.** Taliban momentum has slowed, as a result of both our own modest troop increase, as well as the renewed commitment of our NATO Resolute Support Mission (RSM) Allies and partners who currently contribute over 6,500 troops to train, advise, and assist the Afghan military. Afghan security forces are steadily improving, consistent with President Ghani's four-year roadmap for security sector reform. Ineffective generals and commanders are being replaced by younger, more dynamic officers. Afghan Special Forces are on track to double in size, from roughly 15,000 to 30,000 personnel, and they are increasingly targeting irreconcilable elements of the Taliban who aim to prevent a peace process from gaining steam. These and other military efforts are part of a

concerted effort, as the President articulated in August 2017, to strategically apply force in order to create the conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace.

Of course the Taliban remains a resilient foe. Afghan forces are still laboring to regain control of large areas of rural Afghanistan. Equally – if not more troubling – ISIS Khorasan has increased the pace and scope of its attacks against urban targets, often with a devastating civilian toll. These attacks, which have increasingly focused on ethnic and religious minorities, are clearly aimed at stoking sectarian and political tensions and undermining Afghan popular support for a peace process.

President Ghani, to his great credit, has signaled his steadfast commitment to pressing ahead with a peace process, despite these attacks. But this is obviously a challenging balancing act for him and other Afghan leaders. Through our military and intelligence cooperation with the Afghan government, we are doing everything possible to ensure that ISIS and Taliban hardliners do not succeed in derailing peace efforts. Additionally, we have aggressively countered Russia's false and outrageous claims that the U.S. supports ISIS.

**Second, we are encouraging Afghans from across the political spectrum to come together in support of peace and to put the interests of their country first during upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.** One paradoxical result of the Unity Government is that more Afghans see their governing structures as the spoils of ethnic rivalry. We know from past experience that the upcoming elections – for parliament in October 2018 and for President in early 2019 – will be a real test for Afghans and could lead to further political polarization. Consequently, we are engaging on a daily basis with a broad range of Afghan political figures, in and out of government, and stressing the importance of an inclusive, timely and credible election process. We are also working with other donors to provide targeted capacity building assistance to Afghan electoral institutions to assist with voter registration and ensure more robust measures aimed at reducing electoral fraud. Our assistance appears to be having an impact; an estimated six million Afghans have registered to vote and over five thousand candidates have stepped forward to run for local and national-level office.

Of course, there are going to be political concerns raised by any progress toward a peace process. The prospect of the Taliban returning to Afghan political life in

whatever form is unsettling to many Afghans. Our strong desire is that Afghans will use their upcoming elections as an opportunity to not only engage in a national dialogue on these and related issues, but also to coalesce around a peace vision that will further reinforce to the Taliban the stark choice they face.

**Third, we are supporting Afghan government reforms, in a bid to further sap the insurgency of support.** President Ghani's efforts to increase transparency and accountability are promising, but corruption in Afghanistan will not be eliminated overnight. Economically, we have seen small improvements in growth, but it is not keeping pace with the birth rate, and poverty is increasing. A devastating two-year drought has hit Afghanistan's northern and western provinces especially hard, and will further increase poverty and drive internal displacement.

U.S. assistance is designed to improve the conditions for peace by helping to build Afghan capacity and address these governance challenges. For example, we provide assistance to help the Afghan government improve its delivery of health and education services and partner with Afghan government organizations to counter-corruption. We work with the Afghan private sector to increase exports that generate revenue and provide alternative livelihoods to joining the insurgency and the narcotics trade. Our enhanced bilateral and regional dialogues foster a significant and still growing increase in Central Asian trade with Afghanistan, including increased exports of electricity to Kabul. Alongside our partners in Afghan civil society, we press to increase the participation of youth and women in the formal economy, while also supporting the Afghan government's priority of developing English as a medium of instruction in higher education so that Afghans' can increasingly contribute to socio-economic development. We also continue our work to improve Afghan justice systems, so they can effectively prosecute narcotics traffickers and criminal networks that fuel the insurgency and corruption.

Although the Afghan government's progress in these areas is slower than we would prefer, we have seen real progress. The clearest evidence of this is that the Afghan people are now living longer, healthier lives than at any point in recent memory. Over the past 17 years, an entire generation of Afghans has had an opportunity to go to school instead of going to war. This generation of Afghans also lives in one of the most open media environments in South Asia, with access to hundreds of private radio and TV stations where political debate is free and vigorous. It is this cohort of politically informed Afghans who are now driving

calls for additional reform and for peace. And so we will continue our targeted civilian assistance and keep encouraging Afghan government reforms.

Afghan leaders understand that our conditions-based approach is not a blank check, and through the Afghanistan Compact have asked us to hold them accountable for meeting clear benchmarks. Over the last year, the Afghan government has improved its fiscal performance and is funding a greater share of its budget, reducing its dependence on the United States and other donors. Specifically, the U.S. share of pledged donor support for Afghanistan has fallen from about 50 percent in 2012 to about 25 percent. As such, we have requested \$632.8 million in civilian assistance for FY 2019, down 85 percent since FY 2010. The upcoming Geneva Conference, slated for November 2018, will offer another opportunity to review Afghan progress on government reforms. A central theme of that conference will be how donors can work with the Afghan government to energize the peace process. I hope Congress will join us in putting the United States in a strong position to leverage generous contributions from other donors as we work together toward that goal.

**Fourth, we are engaging with all of Afghanistan's neighbors and near-neighbors to build regional support for the Afghan government's peace vision and discourage spoilers.** Pakistan has an important role to play and has legitimate interests that it wants to ensure are met during any peace process. The dialogue that we have with Pakistan seeks to address those concerns while also encouraging additional concrete support for Afghan peace efforts. For example, with U.S. support, Pakistan and Afghanistan entered into a constructive dialogue to develop the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), an initiative to which we have given our full support. However, despite some positive indicators, we have not yet seen Pakistan take the sustained or decisive steps that we would have expected to see ten months after the announcement of the South Asia strategy, including arresting or expelling Taliban elements who will not come to the negotiating table.

More broadly, all of Afghanistan's neighbors – from Iran and Russia, to India, China, and the Central Asian states – have repeatedly stated their support for an Afghan peace process. All of these countries feel a strong stake in Afghanistan's future security and stability. They all would benefit from a political settlement in Afghanistan, which would help to reduce the terrorist and narcotics threat to their own citizens and also bolster regional economic cooperation. And so we are

expanding our regional engagement and utilizing every diplomatic mechanism – from the C5+1 process with the Central Asian Republics to the Heart of Asia process – to encourage additional concrete support for Afghan-led peace process.

### **Way Ahead**

This is an ambitious agenda and Secretary Pompeo is committed to strengthening our diplomatic effort going forward. That means exploring opportunities to build on the fragile opening created by President Ghani's February 2018 peace offer and by the recent ceasefire.

Congress' support for these efforts remains crucial to our continued progress. I am optimistic that progress can be made in the coming months – if we continue to apply the necessary resources and align our military campaign to increasingly support our diplomacy.

The Afghan people, who face the deadly toll of this war every day, understand that reality. In March, a car bombing outside a sports stadium in Helmand killed 16 civilians and injured more than 50 bystanders. Within hours, family members and other mourners convened a sit-in at the blast site. Their message was simple: it's time to end the senseless violence. In subsequent days, peaceful activists, many of them women, formed a small tent city and began planning a march for peace. And within days, there were "peace tents" being erected in far-flung provinces around the country.

Today, more than three months after the horrific attack, those peace tents are still outside the sports stadium in Helmand and across the countryside. Those courageous marchers earlier this month finally reached Kabul. Along their long journey, they struck a chord with ordinary Afghans of all backgrounds and launched what is now recognized as the first popular movement in favor of peace since this war began – a grassroots movement that started in the heartland of the Taliban's insurgency.

So, the Afghan people and Afghan government have made clear that they want an end to war. In pursuing that goal, they have the United States as their equally determined partner. The key question remains: will the Taliban join us in a peace process? Are they prepared to sit across the table from the Afghan government and United States, and to make the compromises necessary to turn the page on four

decades of violence? As I have outlined to you today, the men and women of the Department of State are doing everything possible to help jumpstart that peace process and achieve this elusive but important goal.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before your committee. I look forward to discussing our strategy and addressing your questions.

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Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Ambassador Well.

We now go to Mr. Eliot Engel of New York, the ranking member of the committee.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this hearing, and Ambassador, thank you for your time and for your service.

Our policy, obviously, toward Afghanistan is critical. Fifteen thousand American troops remain on the ground there fighting America's longest war and we provide billions in assistance every year.

In the 17 years since Americans first deployed to Afghanistan after September 11th, our troops and those of our allies have performed heroically. There has been significant progress on the counterterrorism front against al-Qaeda.

Once estimated as many as 5,000, the number of al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan is now thought to be in the low hundreds. Unfortunately, those gains against al-Qaeda aren't comparable to the fight against the Taliban, which most experts consider a stalemate.

The Trump administration announced its approach to deal with the stalemate nearly a year ago in what it termed a new strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia.

It is meant to be a so-called conditions-based approach that emphasizes fighting to win, downplays nation building, includes a stronger line against Pakistan, and a larger role for India, eliminates time tables, expands targeting authorities for U.S. forces and, notably, commits to sending additional troops.

In sum, the administration seems to be planning to escalate the war in order to break the stalemate, forcing the Taliban to the negotiating table.

But what happens if that stalemate is not broken? In its April 2018 report, the U.S. special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction—what we call SIGAR—found that the share of districts in Afghanistan under government control or influence is 56 percent.

Unfortunately, that ties the lowest level ever recorded by SIGAR. So we need to be honest. Even with the best military in the world it's impossible to kill every member of the Taliban.

Despite the President's talk, even members of the administration acknowledge that the war in Afghanistan will not be won on the battlefield. The President needs a strategy based on the facts as they are, not as he wishes them to be.

So I thank all of the countries which have committed troops to the fight in Afghanistan for so many years. But I worry with attacks on NATO and our allies coming from the President we are undermining the very alliance which binds the coalition fighting for the future of Afghanistan and our security.

So rather than putting more Americans in harm's way, the administration should focus its resources on achieving a political resolution to the conflict. It's a tough pill to swallow, no doubt about it.

Many brave Americans have perished at the hands of Taliban fighters. The Taliban's continued existence is a fact we need to deal with and the old adage remains true—you don't make peace with your friends.

Taliban refuses to talk directly with the Afghan Government. They view it as illegitimate. That's, obviously, made progress on reconciliation impossible.

However, the Taliban has maintained an interest in talking with the United States, even after the President told the U.N. Security Council this past January that the U.S. wasn't prepared to talk right now.

That's a mistake. If American interests are best served by negotiating directly with the Taliban, then we should stop kicking the can down the road.

The Taliban claim that they will completely separate themselves from international terrorism and respect the rights of women and minorities—it's time to see if they are serious.

Recent developments may give us an opening—the recent Afghan Government cease fire, the Taliban separate but reciprocal cease fire, a potential convergence of interests against the growing threat of the ISIS offshoot in Afghanistan.

So far, we have squandered the opportunity. We have heard nothing about how we plan to seize on the cease fire, and that's no real surprise because, as I have been finding for many, many months now, the administration doesn't prioritize diplomacy.

The State Department Office of the Inspector General found that the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs "lost both staff and expertise" as a result of the reckless hollowing out of the State Department.

Among those cuts were the experts on peace talks with the Taliban and reconciliation.

So, Ambassador Wells, now that the hiring freeze is over we will be interested in hearing how the administration plans to reconstitute this expertise. We cannot miss the next diplomatic opportunity because we don't have diplomats up to the job.

And diplomacy is going to be at the center of solving this challenge. After many years of war, it's crystal clear that there is no military solution to end the fighting in Afghanistan.

But that doesn't foreclose a path to peace that advances American security interests. Now is the time to make peace and security our number-one goal and to implement a strategy in Afghanistan that will help us achieve it.

We owe this to the women and men who serve our country in uniform, to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice fighting this war, and to those who perished on September 11, 2001, in my home city of New York.

So I look forward to your testimony. I know you've started and we are very happy to have you here.

I thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Engel.

So, Ambassador Wells, I think the key question here in terms of the willingness of factions in the Taliban or the overall organization to reach some kind of settlement goes to their intentions, and there have been cease fires. But yesterday there were 30 Afghans killed by Taliban soldiers when, on the Taliban side, they lifted that cease fire.

Let me ask you, in your judgment is the Taliban, at the end of the day, interested in a political settlement? What do circumstances tell you and how would we get there?

We saw President Ghani offer a series of moves, of prisoners releases, medical aid for wounded soldiers, this latest cease fire, and fraternization that presumably might bring down the tensions.

And yet, here was the attack yesterday. Give me your view on this.

Ambassador WELLS. The Taliban have long said that they do support a political—or negotiations but only with the United States, not with the sovereign Government of Afghanistan, and I think what we learned from this cease fire that was very interesting was just how much the foot soldiers and the commanders inside of Afghanistan do desire peace, and the celebration of the Eid was spontaneous and it was countrywide.

And so I think where we are right now is the Taliban leadership, many of whom enjoy sanctuary outside of the country and don't feel the pressures of day-to-day war, have not yet been convinced to come to the negotiating table, despite what has been an extremely forward-leaning offer of peace put forward by President Ghani in February.

That peace offer, which was unconditional without any preconditions attached to it and included the offer of considering constitutional amendments to ensure that the Taliban's views were better reflected in the institutions and structure of the Government of Afghanistan, that offer has been endorsed by the international community.

And so our strategy right now I think has to be focused on increasing the pressure that the Taliban feel to take up that offer of negotiation.

Chairman ROYCE. And one of the difficulties in all of this, in getting an organization—a terrorist organization like that to the table is the financing for that organization that makes cash ready at hand every time they are moving narcotics.

I guess one of the great frustrations is for the last 15 years the U.S. Government has spent \$8 billion focused on trying to shut down that and today it is still the biggest cash crop in Afghanistan.

What, in theory, could be done to try to diminish that narcotics trade and all the illegality that that drives as well as the support for the Taliban from a financial standpoint?

Ambassador WELLS. I agree. The narcotics, we assess, account for about 60 percent of the Taliban budget but, more than that, they fuel a criminal network and eat away at the institutions of state through the corruption that they also cause.

What we have done, partly, it's a problem of security. Eighty-five percent of opium is grown in areas that are controlled or contested by the Taliban.

So a key element in combating the Taliban finances is continuing to improve on the battlefield, which we are starting to see a decline in the Taliban's momentum as a result of the South Asia strategy and the new authorities and the new approach that has been adopted underneath that strategy.

But we are also building the institutional capacity of the Afghan Government to prosecute and go after narco criminals and that has

been through working with the ministry of counter narcotics, building special investigative units and national investigation units, working with President Ghani in support of a national drug action plan.

And there have been some successes. Rather than going after individual farmers, we focused on drug labs. Last year, we had 84 joint raids. We interdicted about \$360 million worth of drugs.

There is now a counter narcotics justice center which is prosecuting these narcotics cases. They have a 99 percent conviction record.

So security is a key part. The institutional capacity is important and as is the fact that over the last 16 years we have built up a cadre of Afghans so that the responsibility for undertaking these actions now resides in these Afghan institutions.

Chairman ROYCE. But one of the other things that has to be a prerequisite here is within the Government of Afghanistan that government has to credibly combat corruption, and that has been a longstanding problem.

We have got our Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction where we spend \$55 million per year just to make sure our funds aren't misused, and I would—my time has expired.

I am going to go to Mr. Engel. But I would suggest that tripling down in terms of the pressure we apply on the government there to have transparency and to end those practices is the only sure way to rally confidence on the part of the Afghan population and international community.

We go to Mr. Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador. Let me say this. I am glad that you support negotiations with the Taliban.

But as far as I am concerned, your support only adds to the mixed signals we are hearing from the administration. So when you and Secretary Pompeo and General Miller say that we should negotiate, I am not sure if you're speaking for yourselves or for the administration because, frankly, the White House hasn't been so clear.

The way I see it, if we can talk to Kim Jong-un, certainly, we can talk to the Taliban, and we know the Taliban is interested in direct talks with the U.S.

So why won't the administration accept the offer, if only as a bridge to broader talks that would eventually include the Afghan Government?

Ambassador WELLS. Thank you, sir.

The South Asia strategy is premised on achieving a pathway to a dignified political settlement. I mean, that's victory under the South Asia strategy, and we have worked diplomatically in support of the military campaign to build an international consensus behind a peace proposal that has been put forward by President Ghani and have undertaken various lines of effort to put pressure on the Taliban to bring them to the table.

The Taliban have had a de facto office for many years in Doha and there has been no lack of talking—of other countries talking, of track two talking, of the Taliban hearing from the international

community and from the Afghan Government—the sincere desire to begin a negotiated political process.

And so the offer is on the table. I think we have been very clear about how we see ourselves playing a role in a negotiation, both as participants and supporting the process.

We are a party to this conflict. But the Taliban leadership has to understand that the very nature of a peace settlement, when you talk about forms of governance, the rights of individuals under the constitution, prisoner releases, confidence-building measures—these are sovereign issues. These are issues that have to be negotiated with Afghans and not over the heads of Afghans.

So we will play our role. But the Taliban, if we recognize them as part of the legitimate political fabric of Afghanistan, they have to recognize that the Afghan Government and the many communities of Afghanistan are also part of that legitimate fabric—political fabric of Afghanistan.

Mr. ENGEL. Let me ask you this question. In your testimony, you state that we have a conditions-based strategy in South Asia. But those conditions, however, have never been spelled out.

So what conditions are you referring to specifically? If you could list them, I'd be grateful.

Ambassador WELLS. Again, the conditions that we are seeking to achieve in Afghanistan are cessation of violence, a rejection of terrorism, and respect for the constitution and this is all under the umbrella of not allowing Afghanistan to ever again become a safe haven for terrorists that are planning to attack the United States or its allies.

I think what's significant in those conditions is that they are not preconditions. We have not sought to impose any obstacles to the beginning of a political negotiation between the Taliban and Afghan Government.

What we want to see is what comes out of that process.

Mr. ENGEL. All right. Thank you.

And let me ask you this. We have 40 countries contributing troops to the NATO support mission in Afghanistan, and the operation remains one of the most enduring examples of how we can work with our allies. Germany is the second largest troop contributor, after the United States.

The President seems to indicate that he doesn't agree with or understand the values of alliances or multilateral partnerships such as how the NATO mission in Afghanistan continues to serve the interests of the United States.

So I am concerned about the repeated remarks by the President denigrating the NATO alliance. So I want to just ask you a simple question.

Do you agree that the U.S. is best served by continuing to work with allies and partners around the world? Obviously, the answer would be yes. But I'd like to hear that.

As the President continues to attack the very countries fighting with us in Afghanistan—fighting on our side, how strained cooperation with our allies made it harder to implement our South Asia strategy?

Ambassador WELLS. Having a united international force and diplomatic effort is essential the campaign to stabilize Afghanistan

and we are deeply grateful for the support of our NATO allies and our partners in the Resolute Support mission.

I think you see it in the—what we have been able to do is to spread the burden, which is a key goal of the administration in order to ensure that we are all playing a part and playing a fair part in the contributions to Afghanistan's stability and I think it's a telling statistic that since 2012 our contribution to civilian assistance has gone from 50 percent to 25 percent, and I think we want to continue in that direction to make sure that we and our partners are all pulling in this same direction with the same intensity.

Mr. ENGEL. My time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Engel.

We go to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member.

And it's a pleasure to see you again, Ambassador Wells. When the President first announced our new strategy in Afghanistan last year, the administration told Congress that it would seek a coordinated effort to get the Taliban to the table, as we have been discussing, using layers of diplomatic efforts, and this, we were told, left open the possibility of including Russia and Iran.

If you could elaborate on what extent would you say that Russia and Iran are supporting the Taliban and, if they are, how does that impact our layered diplomatic approach.

And I also wanted to follow up on Pakistan. I know that the administration suspended military aid to Pakistan. It was part of our strategy to get Pakistan to change how it does business when it comes to the Taliban and providing safe harbors, and you testified that Pakistan was on notice that we expect its unequivocal cooperation ending sanctuaries. But also, we haven't really seen Pakistan do the sustained or decisive steps that we would have expected when this new strategy was announced.

Do you have any evidence that Pakistan has taken any steps to cut off the flow of arms, of fighters, or support for the Taliban and have we, in the U.S., allowed for any waivers or made any exceptions to military assistance to Pakistan since the suspension of the aid was announced?

Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador WELLS. Thank you.

We are concerned when we see reports of countries that are seeking to hedge their bets in Afghanistan by—typically by viewing the Taliban as a legitimate force in fighting ISIS Khorasan.

Our strong view is that the only way to defeat terrorism and to bring peace to Afghanistan is to strengthen the Afghan Government and strengthen the government's ability to fight terrorists.

That said, both countries like Russia and Iran do have an important role to play in the future stabilization of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's neighbors are going to have to support any peace process that emerges between the Afghan Government and the Taliban and that's why we worked very hard in a variety of diplomatic formats to ensure that the region is part of this process, informed by the process, and is informed by the principles of peace that have been put forward by President Ghani.

Next week I'll be going to an international contact group meeting of over 30 countries that will be gathering, including Russia and Iran, to reinforce or support for the efforts of President Ghani and our support for peace in the region and we will continue those diplomatic efforts.

Pakistan has a particularly crucial role to play. As General Votel testified, without Pakistan's active support it's going to be much more challenging to achieve our objectives under the South Asia strategy.

We would like to see Pakistan arrest, expel, or bring to the negotiating table Taliban leadership and to date, while we have seen some positive steps, our assessment has been that we have not seen the sustained and decisive actions that are really required to ensure that the Taliban take this peace process seriously. That—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

And then one little nugget, just to leave you with that—the Kabul compact, and President Ghani had said they were going to take a lot of steps for reform.

They announced 100 initiatives, and I hope that in the question and answer you can give us an update on—I haven't heard too much about the reforms.

And we have got a minute—maybe you could tell us what benchmarks does the President have and how do we tend to use those as commitments for preconditions, et cetera.

Ambassador WELLS. We have—the Afghan Government, on its own volition, established the Afghanistan compact. It has over 200 metrics to measure a performance—reform, anti-corruption in the areas of security, governance, economic performance, and then reconciliation efforts.

We meet quarterly with President Ghani to review progress under those metrics. Again, this is an Afghan Government initiative and not something that we have put forward as part of our aid conditionality.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Do you think that they are making progress?

Ambassador WELLS. We do, and we see serious efforts. There are areas where we make progress faster and areas where, when there is less progress, we have been able to have the kinds of top level political conversations to keep the momentum behind reform.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you.

We go now to Mr. Brad Sherman of California.

Mr. SHERMAN. Good to see you, Acting Assistant Secretary and Ambassador, which raises the question—when is the administration going to appoint a permanent assistant secretary for South and Central Asia? Has the administration indicated that?

Ambassador WELLS. Secretary Pompeo, when he testified, indicated that he would be moving soon to make appointments, including for the assistant secretary.

Mr. SHERMAN. Did he criticize or apologize for the fact that throughout the tenure of his predecessor no one had been nominated to a position as important as the one you're acting in?

Ambassador WELLS. I am very grateful that both under Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Pompeo I've been given full writ to undertake this job.

Mr. SHERMAN. But still, the word acting in front of your title undercuts what you do—the uncertainty of whether you'll keep doing it. If the administration had had the wisdom to simply give you the position I wouldn't be asking this question.

It's my understanding that some 30 personnel positions were cut between the South Central Asia office and the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Is there any chance that those cuts are going to be restored?

Ambassador WELLS. Sir, some of—

Mr. SHERMAN. And are they needed?

Ambassador WELLS. Right. Sir, some of the cuts were the result of two bureaus being merged and, you know, when you overlap two bureaus some of the administrative staff, the front office staff, and so we were able to take advantage of efficiencies from the reintegration of the two bureaus.

We have decided to expand our staff who are focused on reconciliation. That team is being built up both here in the State Department as well as in our Embassy in Kabul.

But I would also note that we benefit from what is very much a whole of government approach—that the experts that we have, whether in DoD or the intelligence community, all are part of this one team as we look for ways to move the peace process forward.

Mr. SHERMAN. Does the United States and does India and does Pakistan recognize the Durand line—the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Ambassador WELLS. Afghanistan has not recognized—

Mr. SHERMAN. I know Afghanistan hasn't.

Ambassador WELLS. Right.

Mr. SHERMAN. But what about Pakistan, India, and the United States? Do those three countries recognize the line or you don't know?

Ambassador WELLS. Right. The Durand line serves as an international boundary.

Mr. SHERMAN. And—

Ambassador WELLS. We recognize the sensitivities associated with it.

Mr. SHERMAN. But is it the U.S. position that that is the international boundary?

Ambassador WELLS. That is how we approach the Durand line, yes.

Mr. SHERMAN. But is there equivocation there or is that—

Ambassador WELLS. No.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. So it's just as much an international border as—

Ambassador WELLS. But we believe that the border management is going to be best done when you have the countries working together and so—

Mr. SHERMAN. What about India? Does India recognize that as the international border?

Ambassador WELLS. I actually don't know India's position, sir.

Mr. SHERMAN. I hope you respond to that, because India is a poor country. It does provide foreign aid to a limited degree. There are crying needs for aid to countries that are even closer to India than Afghanistan is, namely, Myanmar, Burma, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.

But India is instead providing substantial aid and has a substantial involvement in Afghanistan.

Is there any harm—what degree of harm does that cause by making the Pakistanis nervous and causing them to support the wrong elements in Afghanistan or at least not to help us go after the wrong elements? To what extent is India's generosity to the people of Afghanistan causing a problem with Pakistan?

Ambassador WELLS. First, we see India's support to Afghanistan as very important. They are a responsible aid provider.

They have pledged \$3 billion in assistance through 2020. The Afghan Government welcomes that assistance and the Afghan Government welcomes and seeks a strategic partnership with India.

When it comes to Pakistan's tensions over and its concerns over encirclement or—

Mr. SHERMAN. So let me interrupt you. Afghanistan wants a strategic partnership with India.

Ambassador WELLS. Yes.

Mr. SHERMAN. Afghanistan claims a huge chunk of Pakistani territory and we are surprised that Pakistan, although you won't admit it and they won't admit it, is working against our interests for a strong united Afghanistan, which longs to be an effective strategic partner of India.

Ambassador WELLS. We have welcomed the recent Afghan-Pakistan discussions to deal with these issues that you raise, including management of the border, and there is been an agreement recently to establish liaison officers and to be able to collaborate more effectively on the border. We are supporting that—

Mr. SHERMAN. I am sure there is some collaboration. There is also substantial support for Pakistan from bad elements in Afghanistan.

I'll just make one final comment and that is you have a very tough job. The only tougher job would be to come to any of our districts and explain why we haven't destroyed the poppy fields, because Afghanistan is a battlefield but so are the towns and cities of the country and many of our neighborhoods.

I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Sherman.

We go to Mr. Chris Smith of New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for convening this very important and timely hearing.

Ambassador Wells, thank you for your leadership and for your sober but, I think, cautiously optimistic take on the prospects for peace. It is encouraging but, of course, the way forward is strewn with obstacles and you know it better than anyone.

But thank you for giving us that insight that there was an exhilarating first taste of what peace might look like. I think that that, again, offers more encouragement that this can happen.

I would like to ask you, if I could, discerning the intent of the Taliban leadership. Taliban is, as you know, as we all know, within the last few hours attacked a base—a Afghan base in Badghis and killed 30 Afghan soldiers, according to Reuters. Perhaps eight or more were wounded.

And there is always a concern that a hostile power will use the prospects of peace or the facade, the cover of peace, as cover to ac-

celerate their violence and I wonder how that has factored into the thinking, yours as well as the administration.

Secondly, on aid conditionality, which you mentioned a moment ago, entities of the Government of Afghanistan, particularly the Afghan local police and Afghan national police, which are on the front lines of combatting the Taliban, as we all know, are known to have recruited children to serve as combatants or as servants, including as sex slaves.

In fact, a 10-year-old boy was assassinated in February 2016 by the Taliban after he had been publicly honored by the Afghan local police forces for his assistance in combat operations against the Taliban.

As you know, the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 requires, subject to an national interest waiver, the United States will cease military aid where the government is allowing children to be trafficked in its forces as child soldiers.

I wonder if you could convey to us how seriously we are raising that issue with the Afghan Government and what steps, if any, did the Government of Afghanistan take in 2017 and into 2018 to cease using child soldiers in its forces?

Ambassador WELLS. Thank you.

I think when it comes to the Taliban resuming violence after the cease fire, this is going to be a critical time, I think, to underscore the dispute within the Muslim world over the *raison d'être*—the reason why they are fighting this war. And we have seen some very important developments.

Pakistan issued a fatwa. Over 1,000 members of their ulama, the religious establishment, condemning suicide bombing, condemning some of the tactics of the Taliban.

The Indonesians gathered Afghan and Pakistani ulama and reiterated this condemnation and called for peace and reconciliation. The Afghan fatwa—over 2,700 gathered and signed a fatwa in favor of peace, against suicide bombing, in favor of peace negotiations.

The OIC is gathering in the next 2 weeks to also have a conversation. I mean, this is, I think, a real moment of changing of opinion in the Islamic world about what is going on in Afghanistan and taking greater ownership and trying to frame that this is the time to negotiate for the Taliban with an Islamic Government of Afghanistan.

And so we will continue to encourage these developments and to put as much pressure as we can on the Taliban through all of the various lines of effort that now is a moment to seize the opportunity of.

At the same time, you're so right that the reforms that the government take are critical. So, when it comes to, for instance, children sex slaves, we have worked with the Afghan Government over many years. That practice is now criminalized in the penal code and in other regulatory measures.

We do extensive Leahy vetting for all of our military assistance and who we work with in Afghanistan to ensure that we are not supporting Afghan officers who are engaged in that behavior.

We have extensive human rights training that we provide, and through USAID we have done vocational rehabilitation of 6,000 of these victims of this sex slave practice.

On child soldiers, same, I think, commitment by the Afghan Government. It's been criminalized. There are active measures to ensure that children are not recruited including 22 centers around the country that interdict when they see efforts for children to be inducted into the service.

And so this is very much on our agenda, sir.

Mr. SMITH. Ambassador Wells, thank you very much.

Chairman ROYCE. Albio Sires of New Jersey.

Mr. SIRES. Ambassador Wells, thank you for coming. We appreciate having you here today.

Ambassador, I just have an observation, then I am going to ask you a question.

I am very hopeful that we do have a prospect for peace in Afghanistan. But I look at the Colombia peace pact and I see what it's done to the drug growth in that country, and I just want to make sure that when we talk about peace, we do take in consideration that this is a very lucrative business in Afghanistan and I don't know if we want to continue just, basically, saying it's okay for them to keep growing this—the opium growth.

So we have seen the growth that has been in Colombia and I hope if we do have a peace in Afghanistan that we focus on that because I would hate to have peace and have such a growth in the opium drug growing.

My question is, we have a growing concern that Afghan politics and society is becoming increasingly fragmented alongside ethnic and ideological lines.

What impact do you think that's going to have for political stability in that country?

Ambassador WELLS. Thank you.

On the issue of narcotics, I agree, again, this is not just an issue that involves the Taliban. This is an issue that is a perversion throughout all of Afghan society—the criminal networks and their ability to corrupt the institutions of the state and society, and it's something that we take very seriously.

We are limited right now because of the security situation and where the opium is grown. But to go back to a point that was raised earlier, rather than undertake eradication, which is not supported by the Afghan Government at this stage, the effort is to go the step up through the drug labs, through targeting of the drug networks to get to that level of individuals who are benefitting more and who are a greater part of the drug trade.

So the efforts continue. The institutional development of the Afghan Government to respond to the narcotics threat and the criminal networks behind them is very much an investment that we have made and will continue to make.

But I agree, we learn from the example of the Colombia peace process and how hard it is. On—

Mr. SIRES. Well, I just make—I want to—just want to make sure they don't look the other way for the sake of peace.

Ambassador WELLS. No, absolutely, sir.

And then on the issue of Afghan society being fragmented, I think you can look at it two ways. I mean, first, the Eid last weekend showed the incredibly unity that still exists in Afghanistan.

The fact that combatants and pro-government supporters gathered together, tens of thousands of people praying together in places like Kandahar is the heartland of the Taliban and the conflict I think gives hope that the basic sinews of Afghan nationalism and nationhood are there.

But yes, we have seen greater ethnic polarization over the last couple of years. The government of national unity has had to deal with issues of inclusivity, of trying to ensure that all facets of Afghan society are represented in government and I think there is going to be a great deal of importance attached to the credibility and the conduct of the elections that are coming up.

And elections have always been a sensitive event in Afghanistan and it's one that we are supporting very carefully and supporting the independent election commission to ensure that as much can be done to reduce the chances for industrial scale corruption and to increase the chances that voters across Afghanistan and voters both female and male will be able to participate.

Mr. SIRES. Are the Russians being obstructionist? I read an article where they are funneling arms into the Taliban.

Ambassador WELLS. The Russians have been very unhelpful in falsely accusing the United States and undertaking propaganda campaigns to suggest that somehow we have introduced ISIS Khorasan into Afghanistan and seek to artificially keep the terrorist battles going.

And so we believe that Russia has an important role to play in being a supporter of peace in Afghanistan. They certainly benefit from a stable Afghanistan.

Mr. SIRES. Are they funneling arms to the Taliban?

Ambassador WELLS. We have seen—Russia denies that but, certainly, we see Russia adopting a posture that the Taliban are a legitimate bulwark against ISIS and we do not buy that as a justification of engagement with the Taliban.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Dana Rohrabacher of California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you very much, and I am sorry that I don't join in your optimism, and watching people pray together is not—I mean, the next thing we know—we could say, well, the next step would be sitting around a campfire singing kumbaya, as it that has anything to do with creating peace in this war-torn country.

Afghanistan is a society that is based on tribalism and ethnicity, and our greatest and what has been reconfirmed today, Mr. Chairman, is that we continue down a road of trying to remake Afghanistan into a democratic system, and that's why we are failing. That's why that will not succeed because it is totally inconsistent with their national character.

And we did this from the very beginning, over my objection many times, we created the most centralized constitution of almost any country in the world and over a people who are the most decentralized people in the world, and then we are surprised when it doesn't work and people are upset and join military units.

Let me ask you, are the Pashtuns still the major element if not the dominant element of the Taliban?

Ambassador WELLS. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. And so now we have the Pashtuns and people who understand that area—that half the Pashtuns are in Afghanistan and half of them are in Pakistan, and let me just say that we have to understand that and deal with that or we are never going to have peace.

We made a mistake in the beginning, trying to, as I say, recreate this centralized government in Kabul and then we permitted crooks and criminals to take over that government and loot the country of billions of dollars and we expect the Afghans just to say, oh well, now we can have a democratic process—look at what it's doing for us.

Let me just note also, the major opium production areas—poppies, in that country is in the Pashtun areas, is it not?

Ambassador WELLS. It's dominated in the Pashtun areas.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right. And we have done nothing.

And let me just note, when I say, yes, we have gone through a lot of PR type of things that make it look like we are doing something.

If we wanted to eliminate the poppy production in Afghanistan, we could do it within a week. We have technological capabilities and we have not done that and thus, we have thus permitted the Pashtuns—the Taliban—to have a major source of billions of dollars of input, which permits them to have the bullets and the guns that are necessary to have the terrorist organization and the radical Islamic type of regime they are trying to build.

Do you know what the status, for those who are watching or reading this? We realize that what really worked in Afghanistan—what really worked after 9/11 was when we allied ourselves with the anti-Taliban forces that were also basically made up of Uzbeks and Tajiks, and the leader of that group was General Dostrum.

For anyone who has seen “12 Strong,” he's the man who actually organized at our effort to drive the Taliban out of power in the first place.

Where is General Dostrum today?

Ambassador WELLS. Turkey.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. And he is in Turkey because there was—there have been major assassination attempts against him. Are the assassination attempts against General Dostrum motivated by Taliban or by people in the Afghan Government that we are supporting?

Ambassador WELLS. My understanding is that General Dostrum is in Turkey for health reasons but that when he does return to Afghanistan there are legal processes that have been brought against him and some of his security officials for the sodomy of a political figure that had been in the custody of General Dostrum's security forces.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right. Yes, you can bet that the people hate us and hate the man who helped us drive the Taliban are willing to say anything about General Dostrum.

And yes, he is outside of Afghanistan for health reasons because they tried to murder him, and 50 of his bodyguards were killed by

the time he and 10 others escaped from an ambush that was not a Taliban ambush.

The American people—we are in a murky situation here. The Pakistanis, who we have been treating with kid gloves, are, clearly, a pro-terrorist element and a pro-Taliban element in this whole fight, and until we start realizing this, all these things about praying together or all the reforms you're talking about and the democratic centralized process in Afghanistan will mean nothing and more Americans will die. We can either get real or we will lose for good.

Thank you very much.

Chairman ROYCE. Tom Suozzi of New York.

Mr. SUOZZI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador, for being here today. I have to admit I am very frustrated in this process of trying to discover what the civilian strategy of the United States of American in Afghanistan is.

I've only been here for a short time, but I've had the opportunity to ask Secretary Tillerson about this. I've had a chance to ask Secretary Pompeo. I've spoken to you over the telephone. I've asked Secretary Mattis. I've asked USAID.

What is our civilian strategy? We hear about the whole of government approach, but I can't get the details of what it is we are actually doing.

So you referenced earlier about the 25 percent contribution toward the civilian efforts that are being made by the United States Government and I want to determine, first, are you referring to the \$3.7 billion a year that was agreed to at the Brussels Conference of which America is putting up \$1 billion a year of that money?

Ambassador WELLS. Yes.

Mr. SUOZZI. Okay. So that was done in 2016 under the previous administration. So that commitment is the commitment that still stands from the Brussels Conference in October 2016?

Ambassador WELLS. Our aid levels are lower than that \$1 billion figure but, in general, that is guiding the approach by us and the international community.

Mr. SUOZZI. So but is the number \$3.7 billion a year that's being spent by the international community or is it lower than that number?

Ambassador WELLS. I would have to get a breakdown of what has actually come through in terms of—

Mr. SUOZZI. Okay. Well, that's what I've been trying to get for a long time. I would like that breakdown of what the international commitment for civilian efforts is, specifically, what the number is, because I had to get this from outside of the U.S. Government to determine what this number was.

I'd also like to know—and I'll send you a follow-up letter if necessary—I'd like to know what are we spending our money on and what is the international community spending its money on.

So it's \$3.7 billion a year, but what are the specific programs that it's being spent on? We heard a lot about poppy eradication. We have heard about a whole bunch of different things.

I'd like to know specifically how much money is being spent on each of the efforts by the Department of State, by USAID, by the

DOJ, by the DEA, specifically, and I've been asking for this for some time. That's why I am frustrated.

I want to know specifically what are we spending our money on and to what effort, because I don't feel like we have a comprehensive strategy.

I feel like we have a list of a lot of good work that's being done by a lot of good people that are working very hard. But I don't see it as being a strategy and I think that's a big contribution. I think the military strategy is clear and we are clearing and holding property.

But in our efforts to transition and to redevelop the areas I don't know what that effort is.

So I am very frustrated, because I've asked this question many times, and I'd like to get specifics about how much money we are spending and what programs we are spending that money on.

Could you, off the top of your head today, give me a rough idea of the billion dollars a year, approximately—or if it's a different number—what percentages are being spent on different efforts?

Like, how much is being spent on infrastructure, as a percentage? How much is being spent on poppy eradication? How much is being spent on schools or on sewers or on teaching prosecutors to be prosecutors?

Can you give us a rough idea of how that money is being spent?

Ambassador WELLS. I am happy to provide and talk to my USAID colleagues to provide a more detailed letter to you with a breakdown of assistance.

As I am sure you heard from USAID, the overall principles that drive the new development strategy are trying to improve the government responsiveness to citizens to increase a private sector-led and export-led growth and to consolidate the social gains in health education and women's empowerment.

Outside of USAID we have INCLE funds which are providing the training for the counter narcotics and the law enforcement capacity. We have the bureau of counterterrorism providing specific assistance programs including to enhance the security of Kabul and other urban areas.

But it is a complicated topic. The numbers are confusing, and we can provide a very detailed letter for you with that breakdown, sir.

Mr. SUOZZI. Okay. That would be very helpful, because even the things that you just told me now—out of the billion dollars, how much is being spent on poppy eradication?

Ambassador WELLS. First off, I want to clarify that it is not \$1 billion. And so when we talk about Afghanistan for 2017, the numbers that I have that are actual, the INCLE moneys were about \$160 million.

Mr. SUOZZI. So if it's not \$1 billion, could you give me a rough idea of what the number is overall?

Ambassador WELLS. The 2019 request that we have is \$632 million.

Mr. SUOZZI. And how about the actual for the—

Ambassador WELLS. That is for the billion—it's \$160 million.

The—I am sorry, the Afghanistan numbers are \$632.8 million request for 2019.

Mr. SUOZZI. And how about 2018?

Ambassador WELLS. For 2018, it was \$782.8 million.

Mr. SUOZZI. Okay. So we made a billion dollar commitment at the Brussels Conference in 2016. We went down—I don't know—you wouldn't happen to have the 2017 number, would you?

Ambassador WELLS. \$847.6 million.

Mr. SUOZZI. Okay. So we are spending \$45 billion a year on military aid, which is not—I am not asking you about that—and we have reduced our commitment from \$1 billion a year. We are now going down to \$632 million a year on civilian aid.

Ambassador WELLS. Yes.

Mr. SUOZZI. Okay.

Chairman ROYCE. We go to Mr. Ted Poe of Texas.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador. Lieutenant General Austin Miller said yesterday that the biggest problem in Afghanistan are the sanctuaries in Pakistan to shelter terrorists. Would you agree with that assessment?

Ambassador WELLS. I agree with the assessment that without Pakistan's support it will be very challenging to achieve our goals in Afghanistan and that Pakistan continues—sanctuaries continue to exist in Pakistan for Taliban Haqqani network leaders and fighters.

Mr. POE. So, over the years, we have had our troops down there in Pakistan. I've been down there on the border, as many other Members of Congress have, and they are doing the best job they can.

But during the day, the Talibanis come across the border, commit mischief, then run back into Pakistan and hide. The Pakistan Government has hidden terrorist leaders in the past.

They are a sanctuary for terrorist leaders, and somehow we still give Pakistan money with the promise that they will do better. They sweet talk us and say oh, give us more American aid—we will go after the terrorists. We do that every year.

We continue to do it. We have done it for I don't know how many years—17—and yet nothing changes. They harbor terrorists. They fight terrorists in their country but they pay for terrorists to go across the border into Afghanistan that kills Americans and our allies and Afghans.

I think it is nonsense that we continue to send money to Pakistan with the promise they will do better. That's just my opinion.

How much money have we spent—taxpayer money—over the last 17 years in Afghanistan?

Ambassador WELLS. On the civilian side, we have spent approximately \$29 billion.

Mr. POE. How about the military side?

Ambassador WELLS. I don't have the figures for that.

Mr. POE. Do you have any estimate?

Ambassador WELLS. I don't.

Mr. POE. So it's \$29 billion on the civilian side and who knows how much on the military side.

Secretary Mattis stated I think in October of last year that the United States has planned—will stay, if necessary, in Afghanistan indefinitely.

Now, to me, that is problematic. No end in sight. We have been there 17 years—no end in sight. You know, history says the War of the Roses lasted 32 years with, basically, no resolution.

The 100-Year War lasted 116 years, between France and England—indefinitely. I find that very alarming that there is no end in sight or that we are prepared to stay there for as long as possible and that the situation hasn't changed—continually, the United States sends money to Afghanistan.

Someone has said that Afghanistan is where empires go to die. I don't know if that's true or not. But nobody ever won in Pakistan—excuse me, in Afghanistan.

So are we, the United States, in the nation building business of Afghanistan? Are we building Afghanistan into a new nation, as Mr. Rohrabacher said, in our image—a democracy?

Are we in the nation building business with that \$29 billion we spent on civilian programs?

Ambassador WELLS. President Trump has been very clear that we are not in the nation building business and I think rather than terming the war an indefinite war, what the administration has sought to counter was the idea of having a troop surge and announcing the departure at the same time, allowing the Taliban to wait us out.

And so we are no longer giving the Taliban the luxury of knowing when the United States plans to leave. Instead, the United States will leave when we are assured that Afghanistan is not again is not again going to become a safe haven for terrorists plotting against us. We can't—we can't—

Mr. POE. And that may be indefinitely. I only have a few seconds. That may be indefinite because we don't know that that's happening. Has the situation changed in the last 17 years?

Aren't we in the same place that we were 17 years ago? We have Pakistan still supporting terrorists. There are terrorists. The government is shaky in Afghanistan. Aren't we in the same situation? But yet, we say—and I am not arguing with the President's policy—we say we will be there indefinitely if need be to make sure that we obtain victory.

Ambassador WELLS. The situation has changed because the Afghan national security forces are the lead. We are not. The situation has changed because we are putting unprecedented pressure on Pakistan, including the suspension of \$1.6 billion in military assistance and \$900 million in coalition support funds.

And so the administration's strategy is being much more proactive in trying to put pressure on those countries and actors that we think can make peace possible.

Mr. POE. I am out of time. I think we should cut off all aid to Pakistan until they come to the table and there is proof that they are not harboring terrorists in their own country and sending them across the border.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Judge.

Ted Deutch of Florida.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Ambassador Wells. It's been more than a decade and a half since we entered Afghanistan and a military solution is becoming more and more unlikely as violence continues to wage.

And we haven't heard enough about the administration's long-term plans outside of the addition of more troops. Many have pushed for dialogue and negotiations with the Taliban.

The Taliban today killed 30 Afghan soldiers. The Taliban entering a political playing field and renouncing violence is absolutely an appealing image. But dialogue with them is also an incredibly dangerous endeavor, I think.

After 17 years of our military combatting the Taliban and facing casualties and destruction, the Taliban continues to engage in terror tactics targeting civilians, the Afghan Government, and U.S. forces, and then the introduction of ISIS-aligned groups has further complicated the field.

I support integrating moderates defecting from the Taliban who aren't committed to the Taliban's radical and evil ideology, and absorbing them in a responsible and safe way is an important step if we can do it.

The recent truce had some promise. But now the Taliban has resumed attacks and further ethnic, tribal, and religious groups who were targets of the Taliban's cruelty and brutality have vested themselves in Kabul's government and the promise of a better future, and the Afghan Government hasn't been hardened to a point where its institutions—its reach, and, I think it's clear, its stability are firm enough to support negotiations from a position of power.

So the main question I have is given, for example, the Taliban's efforts decades past when they went house to house to identify and kill Hazaras, thousands of them being killed, what reaction do we expect from religious, ethnic, or tribal groups in the Afghan Government who have suffered so mightily at the hands of the Taliban if negotiations with the Taliban are entered into?

Ambassador WELLS. Again, we have—we are letting the Afghan Government take the lead in putting forward a peace proposal, which has been, by everyone's account, both visionary and forward leaning.

And so President Ghani has judged that the Afghan people continue to seek peace. That's supported by all the polling data that we see which, regardless of the incredible violence—and you've only mentioned one horrible chapter of violence in Afghanistan.

But regardless of the horrible violence that Afghans have seen, they remain committed to peace, and the celebrations that took place during the Eid are, I think, are a manifestation of what is a broad nationwide desire for peace.

The Higher Peace Council in Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic body. Peace cannot be made between Pashtuns. Peace has to include all of the ethnic and social groups of Afghanistan and, I would argue, it has to include the women of Afghanistan.

So, any peace process is going to have to be broad based.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that. Do you—and I understand the way Ghani views it and I understand what we have seen during Eid.

But are you confident—is our Government confident that the government in Afghanistan is strong enough to be able to do this—

strong enough to be able, specifically with respect to the Taliban, to include them in negotiations.

Ambassador WELLS. Again, I think, because we are not trying to put up hurdles to peace negotiations, where the United States' interests lie is in what comes out of a negotiation process, and so we can—we can live with negotiations that produce the end to violence and the cessation of ties to terrorists and respect for a constitution—a constitution that can be amended, per President Ghani's offer.

And so rather than prejudge whether it can happen or not, we are ready to support the process, facilitate it. We want there to be a negotiated and dignified political solution.

If the Taliban are unprepared and unwilling to make peace, we have made it very clear that we will deny them a military victory.

Mr. DEUTCH. And in—as it relates to providing that support, what are the range of diplomatic tools that we have to support that process and are we utilizing all of them?

Ambassador WELLS. Yes, I think we are utilizing many different levers to support efforts to create a diplomatic process or a negotiated political process.

And, of course, the military pressure is one portion of it. The pressure on Pakistan is important—the pressure we are bringing to bear against Taliban financing.

What we are seeing the Government of Afghanistan do to mobilize religious messaging against the very basis or justification for the Taliban's actions, the international consensus we have built diplomatically and that involves bilateral engagements and multilateral engagements and, of course, always willing to see whether other groups within Afghanistan are prepared to create separate peace.

And so all of these are designed to raise the stakes for the Taliban to create incentives for them to take up what we think is both a fair offer and an offer that can produce a Taliban that plays a part in the political life is an important part of the political life of Afghanistan.

Mr. DEUTCH. Ambassador Wells, I appreciate you being here and I am sincerely grateful for the commitment that you make to this important work. Thanks.

Ambassador WELLS. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Ann Wagner of Missouri.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing this hearing, and thank you, Ambassador Wells, for your service.

I appreciate the opportunity to evaluate the new direction this administration has taken in resolving America's longest war.

Pakistan has a clear interest in preventing the cessation of hostilities in Afghanistan but has made itself central to American operations. In the past, Pakistan has wagered, correctly, that the United States would rather accept Pakistan's incomplete support than lose it entirely.

Ambassador Wells, I believe the President was correct to demand full cooperation from Pakistan last August. How well is the administration communicating its resolve to hold Pakistan accountable for its support of terrorism?

Ambassador WELLS. I think there have been very not only direct talks with the senior leadership of Pakistan but action under the Trump—under President Trump’s administration we have taken the unprecedented step of suspending military assistance and coalition support funds as a result of our assessment that Pakistan had not been undertaking the decisive and sustained steps that are necessary.

I think we agree that Pakistan has a lot to gain by peace in Afghanistan, and so the challenge is how do you secure Pakistan’s support for a negotiated political process rather than its tolerance of proxies.

And we have heard very positive statements, for instance, from the chief of army staff of Pakistan who says that there can be no room for nonstate actors—that Pakistan can’t be normal state as long as there are extremist groups on its soil.

But what we need to see are actions that are taken to ensure that that is the case, and we do not deny that Pakistan has fought its own heroic battles against terrorism. It defeated in large part the Pakistani Taliban. It’s just now reintegrated the federally administered tribal areas into the governing system of Pakistan.

But we treat all terrorist enemies of Pakistan as our terrorist enemies and we expect that Pakistan should do the same.

Mrs. WAGNER. Well, I hope we continue to withhold that funding until we see measurable action, Ambassador.

How is the administration building relationships with Central Asia countries to reduce our dependence on Pakistan?

Ambassador WELLS. We have had excellent relations with the Central Asian countries—longstanding efforts to create the northern distribution network that helps to support our military efforts in Afghanistan.

We had the visit of Kazakhstan’s President, Nazarbayev, in December of last year and Uzbekistan’s President, Mirziyoyev, last month.

Both leaders are important in not only providing the kind of support for the northern distribution network but in stitching Afghanistan back into the region.

And when President Ghani went to Uzbekistan for the first time—first time any Afghan leader went to Uzbekistan was in December—he said Afghanistan is a Central Asian nation, and so through our engagement with the Central Asian states, and we engage in a C-5 format with all of the Central Asians—we very much are supporting their efforts to proactively increase trade with Afghanistan and increase exchanges, give Afghanistan options as it builds out its economy and its diplomatic relations.

Mrs. WAGNER. How do U.S.-Russia relations affect the feasibility of northern supply lines through Central Asia and the Caucasus?

Ambassador WELLS. Well, the northern distribution network has operated successfully and continues to operate successfully. I would just argue, more generally, Russia has important interests and concerns in Afghanistan and an important role to play in helping to stabilize Afghanistan, and we would like to see Russia do more to provide the kind of assistance to the Government of Afghanistan so that both militarily and diplomatically it can defeat or bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

Mrs. WAGNER. Although India declined to put boots on the ground in Afghanistan, it has shown a keen interest in strengthening the Afghan Government's capacity. How is the administration encouraging deeper Indian involvement, briefly?

Ambassador WELLS. We have worked with India. We do joint training programs. USAID—some of its training programs are conducted in India. We have a trilateral with Indian officials and Afghan officials to coordinate our efforts and make sure that we are lashed up in the development approach and diplomatic approach.

And India has play an important role in hosting business conferences so that private sector companies interested in investing in Afghanistan can use India as a launching pad.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Ambassador Wells. My time has expired.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. I'd just remind the members we are expecting votes momentarily. So members don't need to use all of their time.

And we are going to go to Robin Kelly of Illinois.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I won't use all of my time.

How will the October elections influence possible peace talks and if elections do not take place will the U.S. position that the Taliban should negotiate directly with the Afghan Government and not directly with the U.S. change?

Ambassador WELLS. We think it's important that the elections take place in a timely and credible way. It sends a strong signal about the inclusivity and the strengthening of democratic institutions in Afghanistan.

So our efforts to date are very much focused on helping to empower the independent election commission, make sure they have the resources and the capacity to undertake what is a critical reform this electoral season by having voting be based on polling centers so that you stop the industrial level stuffing of ballot boxes.

I think that the Afghan people, as we have seen in both the numbers who have registered and the number of candidates who have come forward are vested in this democratic process.

Ms. KELLY. I'll stop so my colleague can get his question in.

Chairman ROYCE. And we go to Ted Yoho of Florida.

Mr. YOHO. Thanks to my colleague, Ms. Kelly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Wells, thank you for being here. This is just one of those things that everybody wants to come to an end. But yet, I don't see a clear strategy of how we are going to do that.

Answering Ted Poe's question about the cost of U.S. military, since 2001, we have spent \$752 billion is the number I have—so we are well over \$1 trillion—trying to bring peace to Afghanistan.

As Dana Rohrabacher brought up, it's a very tribal and separated culture. The Pashtuns—half in Afghanistan, half in Pakistan—and they are the major opium areas, and if I understand my notes correctly, there is more opium being grown in Afghanistan today than there was before we started our war on drugs, as is there is more cocaine in Colombia after we started the war on drugs and, of course, now Mexico has 72,000 acres of opium.

And so it seems like we are going backwards. With the amount of money, the time, resources, and the loss—tragic loss of life on both our sides and the Afghan, we need a new game plan to do this.

My question to you, is any process you brought up you were talking about in Afghanistan must include the Pashtuns, the women, and things like that, and I agree. I think those would all be good.

But does the system in Afghanistan allow for that with the amount of corruption in the government? What's your thoughts?

Ambassador WELLS. I think the government has been organizing itself in preparation for the possibility of peace negotiations.

You have the establishment and the reenergization of a Higher Peace Council that has—it's multi-ethnic, it has women on it, it's been engaging at provincial levels. It's brought together youth. It's brought together religious leaders and part of a national conversation about what peace might look like.

You've seen gathering of religious leaders, the 20—

Mr. YOHO. And I saw that, and I think that's a great thing that they all came together and they had those three things they denounced.

Let me ask you this. Do the people in Afghanistan, do they believe in a government with a democratic process—are they so ingrained into a tribal government—can they even see the possibility, or are we talking generations to change that situation?

Ambassador WELLS. Well, Afghanistan has had successive elections. I am not trying to deny the tribal nature of society or the importance of tribal structures or tribal elders.

But Afghans have demonstrated, by registering to vote, by stepping forward as candidates, that they've embraced this democratic experience.

Mr. YOHO. Do they understand, believe, and support the constitution in their country? Do they understand that? Because French philosopher de Tocqueville, when he came through North America in the 1800s, he was astounded by the level of understanding that people had of our Constitution, and that has led us where we are at because it was from the bottom up. Do they have that same comprehension? The people on the street.

Ambassador WELLS. I think certainly—I am probably not capable of answering that question. But what I would say, sir, is that enshrined within the Afghan constitution is the ability to change it and the ability to convoke a constitutional loya jirga—a traditional gathering of Afghan leaders.

So I think Afghanistan's constitution does not deny Afghanistan's and traditional forms as well.

Mr. YOHO. It doesn't deny it. But it doesn't empower the people, because—I am going to just cut it off here because we are out of time. But I appreciate your time and I'd love to talk to you more.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Yoho.

Joe Wilson of South Carolina.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Ambassador, very much for your service, and it's very personal to me, the significance of Afghanistan, and that is the attacks of 9/11 occurred from a cave—Osama bin Laden oper-

ating out of a cave in Afghanistan to attack the people of the United States and so, to me, the success of what you are trying to do is so important.

And then I am also grateful—my former National Guard Unit, the 218th brigade led by General Bob Livingston—served there for a year and developed extraordinary appreciation of the people and the talents of the people of Afghanistan.

And then I am also grateful my youngest son, Second Lieutenant Hunter Wilson, served for a year as an engineer. So I've seen it from ground up with almost 15 visits over the years to see the potential that we have and it's so important.

And, of course, it does relate to the global war on terrorists and that is that the focus of counter ISIS campaign has been on Syria and Iraq.

But ISIS has a foothold in Afghanistan and continues to launch attacks against Afghan and coalition forces. To what extent is the Islamic State Khorasan Province—ISKP—a threat to stability of the security of Afghanistan?

Ambassador WELLS. Estimates are broad but perhaps 2,000 to 5,000 ISIS fighters exist in Afghanistan. They are primarily drawn from other disaffected members of other terrorist groups, whether it's the Taliban or TTP or IMU—the Uzbek dominated group.

But I think we have to be cornered by its resilience. We take it seriously. We have targeted heavily in Nangarhar

and Kunar and as well as in Jowzjan in the north where there is been an outpost, and it's a reminder to us that there is something worse than an insurgency that's nationalist in nature.

So it is a threat we take extremely seriously and have devoted significant assets to eradicating.

Mr. WILSON. And indeed, a safe haven for ISIS, for Islamic terrorists there had direct consequence here.

Have the changes in the ISIS relationships with other groups in the area or activity internal cohesion or operational abilities—to what extent is the group a target of U.S. operations or strategic planning?

Ambassador WELLS. I think ISIS is a reminder of why we are still in Afghanistan and need to have this commitment to Afghanistan, because the chaos and the insecurity that the Taliban insurgency has created has allowed this petri dish for other terrorist groups to take advantage.

We are in Afghanistan because Afghanistan poses a threat to our homeland and it poses a threat to our allies, and we take it very seriously.

I would defer to my military colleagues for the details of the counterterrorism operations that are underway. But we have intensified those operations.

We have taken out the leader of ISIS K in Jowzjan and we continue to—I think we have conducted over 1,400 operations over the course of the last year directed against ISIS.

Mr. WILSON. And, Ambassador, your comments are just so refreshing to the real world and the ultimate result, protecting American families.

Last August, the administration announced the new South Asia strategy, which focused on conditions-based rather than time-based

objectives. What are the conditional-based objectives are we utilizing to measure success?

Ambassador WELLS. That is going to be the cessation of ties to terrorism, the cessation of violence, and support for the constitution that can be achieved through a negotiated political settlement.

Mr. WILSON. And finally, Afghanistan is a critical point in democracy. What democratic institutions have been most reliable and effective in promoting voter education and rights of the Afghani people and are they capable of producing credible elections this fall?

Ambassador WELLS. The independent election commission has the lead. This is going to be the first Afghan-led and conducted election. This is not an election that's being put on by the international community or the U.N.

And so that's a reflection of the increased capacity. I think political parties also have an important role to play in educating and encouraging Afghans to vote and to understand the system.

And this is very much a work in progress. There are very few countries that are younger than modern Afghanistan. And so I think we have to expect that improvements will occur over time.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Tom Garrett of Virginia.

Mr. GARRETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank my colleague, Joe Wilson, and the Ambassador, because I heard something that really, I thought, was succinct and insightful and that is, I believe, paraphrasing, there are threats greater than an Islamist insurgency that's nationalist in its nature.

So we recognize that while the Taliban is bad that the ISIS, which has a global sort of orientation is probably worse, which doesn't eradicate our responsibility to address the Taliban, particularly as it relates to sort of if you break it you buy it and the circumstances on the ground in Afghanistan.

But let me go, for a moment, down that road. I think we fail when we overlap an American paradigm on the foreign affairs arena. Americans presume that when we deal with other nations there is a strong preeminent Federal Government.

I would argue that in Afghanistan right now, try as they might, there is not that—that they aspire to have a strong preeminent Federal Government but the fact that you can't drive from the airfield to the compound without enhanced security measures would indicate that in fact the control of the centralized Government of Afghanistan isn't what they'd like for it to be—the security apparatus, et cetera.

So we need to understand the reality on the ground in whatever country that we are dealing with, in this case Afghanistan, doesn't mirror that which we have become familiar with here at home.

Number two, we talk about the Taliban, and I would posit and seek your comment in a moment on the fact that I would argue at this juncture there is no "the Taliban." There are Talibans. In other words, there is no unified central control of Taliban-oriented elements as there was, say, for example, under Mullah Omar, but instead sort of disparate warlords with some overlap as it relates

to their interests who act, in many instances, autonomously, thus creating an even harder circumstance for folks like yourself, Ambassador Wells, and any NATO forces, coalition forces, and the Federal Government of Afghanistan to deal with because we see things like atrocities committed against civilian contractors driving supplies, et cetera, that are documented on the internet, which, obviously, the useful end to those would be many fold—that is, to intimidate those who would work for the Federal Government, to intimidate the coalition, et cetera—perpetrated by subgroups of the Taliban but not endorsed by other groups.

Eliot Engel said in his opening comments, you need not make peace with your friends, which I thought was insightful in and of itself, and yet there are Taliban elements that have expressed, I would argue, differing degrees of willingness to sit down and talk, and there are those who will probably be, for lack of a better, more artistic term, dead enders.

So with that as a basis, the money for the narcotics industry in Afghanistan does not flow, I would ask, directly to the government. Is that correct?

Ambassador WELLS. Sorry. The money from where?

Mr. GARRETT. So the money from the narcotics industries in Afghanistan—the poppy fields, et cetera—does not flow directly to the Federal Government—some of it ends up there. But it doesn't, correct?

Ambassador WELLS. No.

Mr. GARRETT. But the aid that's administered to Afghanistan from the United States, its allies—the coalition, if you will—does flow through the government, correct?

Ambassador WELLS. It flows through—a portion of it flows through a trust fund that's administered by the World Bank—

Mr. GARRETT. Right.

Ambassador WELLS [continuing]. And then the remaining money with just a very little bit of an exception is administered separately on off-budget programs administered by USAID and others.

Mr. GARRETT. What I am driving at—yes, ma'am.

And so what I am driving at, though, is that perhaps have we considered a paradigm wherein we tie aid and development to Afghanistan to eradication efforts? In other words, the government benefits and hopefully strengthens itself as it relates to creating stable sustainable Afghanistan where there is this broad a spectrum of home, moving forward, as possible, more directly from revenues from the international community than from the narcotics-developing community, correct?

Ambassador WELLS. But the challenge we face is 85 percent of opium is produced in Taliban-controlled or contested areas and so, again, this is a security issue, I think, is a first cut.

Mr. GARRETT. But you've said earlier today that the Government of Afghanistan has indicated an interest in not undergoing eradication programs at this juncture. Is that an accurate assessment?

Ambassador WELLS. Yes. The government would assess—it would increase the appeal perhaps of insurgent organizations.

Mr. GARRETT. Right. And so it's something to talk about. I am not dictating that this is what I think the policy should be. But if you look at what the actual functioning Federal Government, to the

extent that it exists in Afghanistan, derives benefit from, I would submit that if they were given an either/or, they would probably fall on the side we wanted them on.

Going—really quickly, there is a man cap tax on contractors in Afghanistan that we have become aware of that stems from the Karzai regime, which is arbitrary and probably not consistent with existing agreements.

Has anything been done to address that? Because what it does ultimately is it taxes the American citizens as we pay for contractor missions to develop infrastructure, security, et cetera, by virtue of creating additional cost.

Has anybody done anything about this man cap tax? Are you familiar with that which I am speaking of?

Ambassador WELLS. I am not. But we can follow up.

Mr. GARRETT. Thank you so much. I've run out of time.

I thank the chairman. Thank you, Ambassador Wells.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Mr. Garrett, thank you very much.

And I thank you also, Ambassador Wells. We have heard creating the circumstances for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is a very complex but very critical mission.

The administration has taken several good steps toward that end. But we need to see more progress, and at this point we have got 1 minute left to a vote on the floor.

So this hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:38 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

# A P P E N D I X



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**FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman**

June 20, 2018

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

**DATE:** Wednesday, June 20, 2018  
**TIME:** 10:00 a.m.  
**SUBJECT:** U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan  
**WITNESS:** The Honorable Alice G. Wells  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*





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X	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
	Ami Bera, CA
	Lois Frankel, FL
	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
X	Joaquín Castro, TX
X	Robin Kelly, IL
	Brendan Boyle, PA
	Dina Titus, NV
X	Norma Torres, CA
X	Brad Schneider, IL
X	Tom Suozzi, NY
	Adriano Espaillat, NY
X	Ted Lieu, CA

**Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Eliot Engel**  
U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan  
June 20, 2018

*Expanded Military Authorities*

**Question:**

How exactly is the Administration employing the additional military resources in Afghanistan? Will there also be any increase in our diplomatic presence in Kabul to match up with the increase in military presence?

**Answer:**

The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan focuses on two well-defined and complementary missions: a counter-terrorism mission against al-Qa'ida and ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), and the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to train, advise, and assist Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. We defer to the Department of Defense on the details of how these military resources are deployed, but would emphasize that their mission is to support our effort to secure a political settlement. As President Trump explained when he announced the South Asia Strategy in August 2017, "Military power alone will not bring peace to Afghanistan," rather "strategically applied force aims to create the conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace."

With our conditions-based strategy we have made clear to the Taliban that they cannot win on the battlefield and they cannot wait us out. The State Department has been working closely to support Afghan Government efforts to engage in a peace process and we have seen significant progress over the past 11 months since the South Asia Strategy was announced. President Ghani publicly invited the Taliban to enter negotiations without preconditions, and during the Eid religious holidays in June Afghanistan enjoyed its first ceasefire in 17 years. There have also been localized peace initiatives since the end of the ceasefire. Though the Taliban is a resilient adversary, the Eid ceasefire demonstrated that many of their fighters are, like the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people, ready for an end to the conflict: its leadership, on the other hand, is standing in the way of peace. We are working actively through multiple channels to support a negotiated end to the war.

Using existing resources, the Department of State has expanded its staffing for this peace effort, with dedicated teams now operating both in Washington and in Kabul. In Kabul, the Embassy and our diplomatic staff in country support our national interests by facilitating political and economic reform, strengthening the rule of law, countering the spread of dangerous narcotics, and supporting our security objectives. Further, the Embassy has a new Peace and Reconciliation Section (PARS), which leads Mission efforts to support and implement the Department's strategy. The Department is considering adding resources to support local efforts to de-escalate violence and stabilize communities through increased development programming.

In addition, the PARS Counselor chairs an interagency mechanism, the Peace and Reconciliation Action Group (PRAG), to ensure close coordination among diplomatic, defense, development, and intelligence agencies. Working together, PRAG members optimize U.S. and NATO cooperation in Afghanistan in support of our peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development goals. These goals include working with the Afghan government to launch trust-building and negotiating processes, supporting local initiatives to de-escalate violence, and bolstering development capabilities to deliver services that will stabilize communities.

***Diplomatic Tools***

**Question:**

What diplomatic tools is the Administration using to support stabilization efforts in the country? What additional resources would help in these efforts?

**Answer:**

The Administration's overall goal for Afghanistan is a negotiated political settlement between the government and the Taliban. To this end, we are using all tools, including diplomatic tools, to support Afghan efforts to reduce violence, support upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, encourage Afghan government reforms and engage all of Afghanistan's neighbors and others to build support for the government's efforts to secure peace. Our efforts also include development assistance, public affairs and media engagements, counter-narcotics and law enforcement efforts, initiatives to promote human rights and the rule of law, as well as direct diplomatic engagements within Afghanistan, in regional countries and in the broader community of donors and NATO partners.

We currently have the resources we need to protect and advance our interests in Afghanistan. Recognizing the centrality of a political settlement to our efforts in Afghanistan and more broadly to our South Asia strategy, we are increasing the number of diplomats working specifically on peace and reconciliation issues in Afghanistan.

***Staffing***

**Question:**

How many people at the State Department are currently working solely on Afghan reconciliation? When the team is fully staffed, how many people will you have?

**Answer:**

Under Secretary Pompeo's leadership, we are reinvigorating U.S. diplomatic efforts to support an intra-Afghan peace process. We are expanding our staff focusing on reconciliation, both in the State Department and in our Embassy in Kabul.

Within the SCA Bureau we currently have three officers who work full time in the Afghanistan Office on peace and reconciliation issues, plus several others who support on these issues as required. There are many more in other bureaus who focus on intelligence, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and other aspects of the challenge.

Our Embassy in Kabul recently established a Peace and Reconciliation Section (PARS) that leads Mission efforts to implement the South Asia Strategy. As currently envisaged, the PARS would be staffed with ten officers. The Officer who heads the PARS also chairs an interagency group, the Peace and Reconciliation Action Group (PRAG) that draws in interagency colleagues to ensure close coordination among diplomatic, defense, development, and intelligence agencies.

#### *Taliban-Al Qaeda*

##### **Question:**

Does the Department believe the Taliban can separate from al-Qaeda and international terrorism?

##### **Answer:**

Yes. It is the Department's position that the Taliban can and must separate from al-Qaida and international terrorism. Our longstanding position remains that as an outcome of any peace agreement, the Taliban must abandon violence, respect the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities, and break ties with al-Qaida and international terrorism. Our pursuit of a negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan aligns directly with our goal of eliminating the transnational terrorist threat from Afghanistan.

As President Trump said last August regarding our efforts in Afghanistan: "America's interests are clear: We must stop the resurgence of safe havens that enable terrorists to threaten America."

#### *Cease-Fire*

##### **Question:**

In response to the Afghan government's ceasefire, the Taliban announced its own three -day ceasefire. What conclusions do you draw from the Taliban's offer and the implementation?

##### **Answer:**

The overlap between the Afghan government and Taliban ceasefires brought peace to Afghanistan during the most recent Islamic holiday in June, with Afghan soldiers and Taliban praying together, side-by-side. This situation showed that many Taliban fighters want peace as much as their fellow Afghans. Judging from the Taliban's public reaction, these events worried and confused the Taliban's leadership. These leaders, who live outside Afghanistan, who refused an offer to extend the cease-fire, and who never officially responded to President Ghani's call for peace in February, are the central impediments to securing enduring peace.

*Electoral Reforms***Question:**

After the disputed 2014 elections, there were a few areas for reform that both the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan and Afghanistan's Electoral Management Bodies needed to address. What is the status of these electoral reforms?

**Answer:**

Following the 2014 Afghan presidential election, President Ghani established a Special Electoral Reform Commission (SERC) following consultations with Chief Executive Abdullah. The Commission's recommendations informed a new electoral law that went into effect in 2015. The government also reconstituted Afghanistan's electoral bodies, disbanding the discredited Independent Elections Commission (IEC) and Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) and hiring new leadership for both bodies.

The new IEC leadership, supported by the United States and other international donors, has announced a date of October 20, 2018 for parliamentary elections. Ahead of those elections, in April – July 2018, the IEC completed a nationwide polling-center based registration of over 8 million voters, the first of its kind in Afghanistan. The polling-center based registration will tie voters to a single polling station, allowing the IEC to limit the number of blank ballots provided to each polling station on election day, reducing the opportunities for industrial-scale ballot-stuffing seen in prior elections.

*Pakistan CT***Question:**

Six months after the suspension of security assistance, the Administration has concluded that Pakistan has made no irreversible progress in its relationship with terrorist groups. What's are the Administration's next policy steps towards Pakistan?

**Answer:**

The South Asia strategy recognizes that we cannot continue with business as usual with Pakistan as long as Pakistan does not address U.S. concerns about its policies, including its failure to address terrorist sanctuaries. We have made clear to the highest levels of Pakistan's government that the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e Tayyiba and other militant and terrorist groups must not be allowed to use Pakistani soil to plan or launch attacks against neighboring countries.

Because Pakistan has not taken sufficient action on our requests, the United States has suspended the vast majority of security assistance and security-related payments to Pakistan. The United States is still prepared to lift the suspension of security assistance once Pakistan undertakes

decisive and sustained efforts to significantly disrupt the capacity of terrorist groups to both raise funds and carry out attacks against neighboring countries.

We continue to engage with Pakistan's leadership in private, and we will use the full range of tools at our disposal to encourage Pakistan to take action against all militant and terrorist groups operating on its soil. Discussions about which specific tools to use and when to use them are ongoing within our Department and the interagency. We will calibrate our relationship in accordance with the degree to which Pakistan addresses our concerns.

### ***Taliban on Human Rights***

#### **Question:**

In those almost 25 years the Taliban has been around, have the Taliban's views on women and minority rights or girls' education evolved?

#### **Answer:**

The Taliban have not publicly revised their earlier positions regarding minority rights or women and girls. They have stated that they are in favor of women's education, and in areas of Afghanistan where they have control or influence, girls are encouraged to go to school, albeit in segregated classrooms and subject to the availability of female teachers. Female education generally ends when girls reach puberty and they are obliged to stay out of the public eye, whether in markets or schools.

While there is no clear evidence that the Taliban's official views have changed, Afghan society has evolved greatly since 2001. More women are in positions of leadership and more than 40 percent of the nine million enrolled in school are girls, of whom 2.5 million are enrolled in primary and secondary school. More broadly, Afghans have made real progress on human rights over the last 17 years, and we continue to work with the Afghan government, our allies, and our partners to solidify and build on that progress.

These changes have put pressure on the Taliban to make local accommodations with a population that wants better healthcare and education for their boys and girls. If the Taliban evolves into a legitimate political movement within Afghanistan, it is possible that these local accommodations would be replicated on a national scale and that their positions would shift on the rights of minorities, women, and girls education. We would look for concrete manifestations of these shifts during an intra-Afghan peace process. Our desired outcomes for such a peace process are clear and have not changed.

***Child Soldiers*****Question:**

Last year, there was serious concern over the Administration's failure to include Afghanistan on the Child Soldiers Prevention Act listing, despite credible reports indicating that some children fought alongside Afghan national defense and security forces. How would you judge Afghanistan's record this year as it relates to the use of child soldiers?

**Answer:**

We remain concerned about reports of the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan Local Police and Afghan National Police. We continue to emphasize to the Afghan government the importance of aggressive action to prevent the unlawful recruitment and use of children in security forces. We also continue to encourage the Afghan government to ensure adequate resources are allocated towards establishing and maintaining successful reintegration services.

At the same time, we are encouraged by Afghanistan's commitment toward compliance with the UN Action Plan and the steps it has taken thus far to end the recruitment and use of children in its security forces. The government currently operates a total of 22 Child Protection Units (CPUs) across the country, which have to date prevented an estimated 1,300 underage recruits from joining the Afghan security forces.

In December 2017, the Ministry of Defense enacted a new Protection of Children in Armed Conflict policy defining the rights of children and prohibiting child recruitment. The new policy established procedures for monitoring and enforcement, reporting violations, and rescuing and caring for children involved in armed conflict. In February 2018, the government enacted a new penal code which specifically increased penalties for the use of children in armed conflict, in both combat and non-combat roles.

***Afghanistan Compact*****Question:**

Can the Department please provide the committee with the set of initiatives and benchmarks that make up the Afghanistan Compact? How is the U.S. government using the compact to hold the government of Afghanistan accountable for its own progress? Is foreign assistance tied to progress on the Compact? What benchmarks are being used?

**Answer:**

The Afghanistan Compact's initiatives and benchmarks have not changed since we shared them with the Committee in March 2018. The Compact includes more than 1,000 specific, time-bound reform measures aimed at improving security, governance, and economic growth. The Compact is a set of commitments from the Afghan government to the Afghan people, which require relevant

Afghan ministries to report on their progress at monthly working group meetings and to answer to President Ghani every few months at Compact Executive Committee meetings. By institutionalizing an evaluation process and deadlines, the Compact has proven to be a useful tool for keeping the Afghan government focused on its own progress. Foreign assistance is not directly tied to progress on the Compact, although we use certain benchmarks in the reports required by the annual appropriations acts.



**Questions for the Record from Representative Ilana Ros-Lehtinen**  
U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan  
June 20, 2018

**Question:**

Ambassador Wells, has the United States allowed for any waivers or made any exceptions to military assistance to Pakistan since the suspension of such assistance was announced, and if so, why, when, and how much in total assistance has gone to Pakistan?

**Answer:**

The Administration continues to discuss potential exceptions to the security assistance suspension. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis if they are determined to be critical to U.S. national security interests, and we will ensure Congress has appropriate visibility if/when any exceptions are approved. We can provide more background in a classified setting.

**Question:**

Can you provide an update on Afghanistan's progress on the Kabul Compact? Specifically:

- A. Can you provide us with a full list of reforms identified by the Afghan government?
- B. What specific benchmarks or metrics are being used to assess Afghanistan's progress on these reforms, and are there timelines pledged by the Afghan government to meet certain reforms?
- C. How are we holding the Afghan government accountable for progress on these reforms, if at all, and how are the Afghans holding themselves accountable?
- D. Are we conditioning any of our assistance to the Afghan government on progress made with respect to the Compact, and if not, why not?

**Answer:**

The Afghanistan Compact's initiatives and benchmarks have not changed since we shared them with the Committee in March 2018. The Compact includes more than 1,000 specific, time-bound reform measures aimed at improving security, governance, and economic growth. The Compact is a set of commitments from the Afghan government to the Afghan people, which require relevant Afghan ministries to report on their progress at monthly working group meetings and to answer to President Ghani every few months at Compact Executive Committee meetings. By institutionalizing an evaluation process and deadlines, the Compact has proven to be a useful tool for keeping the Afghan government focused on its own progress.

We have not conditioned foreign assistance directly on Compact benchmarks, although we use certain benchmarks in the reports required by the annual appropriations acts. Since the Compact is the Afghan government's commitment to the Afghan people, rather than a bilateral agreement, it was never intended to serve as the basis for a U.S.-Afghan incentive program.



**Questions for the Record from Representative Lois Frankel**  
U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan  
June 20, 2018

***Girls' Education***

**Question:**

With 43 percent of Afghanistan's districts now either under Taliban control or being contested, what is the State Department doing to preserve and expand the gains we've made in educating Afghan girls?

**Answer:**

Over the last 16 years, women and girls in Afghanistan have experienced notable progress, particularly in health and education for those in major cities. Approximately 40 percent of the more than 9 million students enrolled in schools are girls. While significant social and cultural challenges remain, the government has publicly committed to improving access to education, naming 2018 the "Year of Education Reform", promising reforms to the Ministry of Education, and engaging its Citizen Charter initiative to reach more out-of-school children.

To sustain and expand these gains, the State Department supports a number of programs and initiatives, including: funding university scholarships for female students to study at universities in Afghanistan and in the region; encouraging the Afghan government to reform and strengthen laws to protect the rights of women, including their right to a public education; providing education, training, and mentoring to Afghan legal professionals, especially those investigating and prosecuting violence against women; and collaborating with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide English classes, computer skills training and tutoring in science and math in women's dormitories in major public universities in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. Through the English Language Instruction for Women program, 308 female students participate in English programs at women's dormitories at Kabul and Herat Universities and 142 female students are enrolled in English classes at the Women's Resource Center in Balkh province.

**Question:**

Are our education programs reaching districts where the Afghan government is no longer fully in control?

**Answer:**

USAID-supported education programs in Afghanistan serve the national public school system in all 34 provinces, reaching the most marginalized Afghan children. Examples of our educational programs include the provision of textbooks and education quality improvement programs through the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

While some of the rural areas that receive assistance to educate Afghan school children may not always remain under consistent government control, the Department of State and USAID take very seriously our responsibility to ensure that U.S. taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and in support of U.S. national security objectives. It is challenging to monitor and evaluate development programs in Afghanistan, including through the ARTF, due to the country's insecurity. However, USAID and the World Bank continue to collaborate to ensure the best possible monitoring systems are in place to ensure effective use of foreign assistance resources. In 2017, USAID and other donors collaborated with the World Bank to further strengthen its monitoring and oversight of ARTF, resulting in an enhanced monitoring plan that includes improved information-sharing mechanisms and periodic performance evaluations of the World Bank's monitoring entities. Starting in September 2018, USAID will continue its education support in Afghanistan through the ARTF's Education Quality Reform in Afghanistan (EQRA) project.

Today, due to the efforts of the Afghan government, the United States, and other international donors, more than 9.2 million Afghan children are enrolled in school, 39 percent of which are girls. According to the Afghan Ministry of Education this is a significant increase from around 900,000 children enrolled, mostly boys, 17 years ago. In March, President Ghani noted that 3.5 million children remain deprived of education, and that his government had directed the Education Ministry to implement a plan to overcome this challenge, including opening more schools across the country and hiring 18,000 people for vacant posts to be announced in the education sector this year. President Ghani also vowed to improve women's role in the Education Ministry's leadership.

***Women, Peace and Security***

**Question:**

As the prospects rise for a peace settlement between the Taliban and Afghan government, what steps is the State Department taking to ensure that Afghan women have a seat at the negotiating table?

**Answer:**

President Ghani told the Kabul Peace Conference on February 28, "First, since peace has to be a national discussion, we will hold a national consultation to develop a joint peace agenda that is representative of the Afghan nation and not the property of any one group. It must pay particular attention to the experiences and demands of our women and the views of our diverse civil society." The United States continues to press all senior Afghan government officials, including President Ghani, to live up to this commitment, and that the government should carefully build a broad social and political consensus around efforts to support peace in Afghanistan. The Department, through an interagency agreement with the United States Institute of Peace, is funding research on the role of women as both peacemakers and extremists in Afghanistan to inform the design of future programming on countering violent extremism (CVE) by the U.S. and Afghan governments. The Department continues to advocate for greater roles for women in national and local peace efforts, including on Afghanistan's High Peace Council, which recently increased its percentage of women members to nearly 20 percent. The Department of State funds media training to support female politicians in elections, and through USAID's Women in Government program, provides

opportunities for 3,000 female university graduates to receive civil service training and participate in internships in local and national government organizations.

**Question:**

How is the State Department supporting Afghan women's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism, including building the capacity of women-led civil society groups?

**Answer:**

The Department, through an Interagency Agreement with the United States Institute of Peace, is currently funding research on the role of women as both peacemakers and extremists in Afghanistan to inform the design of future programming on countering violent extremism (CVE) by the U.S. and Afghan governments. The Department continues to advocate for greater roles for women in national and local peace efforts, including on Afghanistan's High Peace Council, which recently increased its percentage of women members to nearly 20%.

The Department works with the Afghan Office of the National Security Council (ONSC) and the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs (MOHRA) to promote intra-faith communication and a moderate vision of Islam in the country. The ONSC is finalizing a national CVE strategy. MOHRA has worked with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to advance the goal of allowing women to attend mosques.

On February 15, 2018, a Kabul-based non-governmental organization hosted an international summit on CVE that produced proposals to address extremism on a regional level. The summit was designed to build momentum for future regional CVE efforts, including future events in Kabul to discuss women and extremism.

The Department is involved in ongoing efforts to provide training and mentoring to Afghan legal professionals on investigating and prosecuting violence against women. We work with civil society to fund and support shelters, legal aid, and counseling for survivors of gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. The Department also funds media training to support female politicians in elections and programs to counter harassment of women serving in the security services and protect female journalists.



**Questions for the Record from Representative Joaquin Castro**  
U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan  
June 20, 2018

***Pakistan***

**Question:**

Has the government of Pakistan ceased its support for the Haqqani network and other terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba?

**Answer:**

As part of the U.S. South Asia strategy, we have made clear to the highest levels of Pakistan's government that the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, and other militant and terrorist groups must not be allowed to use Pakistani soil to plan or launch attacks against neighboring countries.

Pakistan has taken some initial steps since the announcement of the U.S. South Asia strategy, but it has not taken the decisive and irreversible action against militant and terrorist sanctuaries that we believe are necessary. The Taliban, Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, and other militant groups are still able to plan and execute attacks in neighboring countries from Pakistani soil. Pakistan's insufficient action against these groups prompted us to suspend the vast majority of security assistance and security-related payments to Pakistan. We continue to engage with Pakistan's leadership in private, and we will use the full range of tools at our disposal to encourage Pakistan to take action against all militant and terrorist groups operating on its soil.

**Question:**

What efforts have you and the Department of State taken to follow up restrictions on security assistance to Pakistan in order to end its support for designated terrorist groups, including the Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba?

**Answer:**

The South Asia strategy recognizes that we cannot continue with a "business as usual" approach to Pakistan as long as Pakistan has not addressed U.S. concerns about its policies, including its failure to address terrorist sanctuaries on its territory. We have made clear to the highest levels of Pakistan's government that the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e Tayyiba and other militant and terrorist groups must not be allowed to use Pakistani soil to plan or launch attacks against neighboring countries.

Because Pakistan has not taken sufficient action on our requests, the United States has suspended the vast majority of security assistance and security-related payments to Pakistan. The United States is prepared to lift the suspension of security assistance once Pakistan undertakes decisive

and sustained efforts to significantly disrupt the capacity of terrorist groups to carry out attacks against neighboring countries, and to raise funds.

We continue to engage with Pakistan's leadership in private, and we will use the full range of tools at our disposal to encourage Pakistan to take action against all militant and terrorist groups operating on its soil. Discussions about which specific tools to use and when to use them are ongoing within our Department and the interagency. We will calibrate our relationship in accordance with the degree to which Pakistan addresses our concerns.

**Question:**

What impact has the Government of China's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had on U.S.-Pakistan relations?

**Answer:**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has had a limited overall impact on U.S.-Pakistan relations. Pakistan needs to take aggressive steps to complete major economic reforms, and the overall business climate remains challenging for U.S. firms to invest in Pakistan – concerns that pre-date CPEC. While the Pakistani government publishes general information about CPEC projects to promote a nominal level of transparency, U.S. firms are generally not provided bidding information. Pakistani officials, companies, and citizens have expressed concerns regarding the inclusivity and transparency of CPEC projects, as well as their ability to meet basic standards for debt sustainability and good environmental and fair labor practices. The United States continues to press Pakistan on creating conditions for a level economic playing field. Pakistan has not made any meaningful changes in the way that CPEC projects are being managed since the Corridor's conception in May 2013.

**Question:**

Does the Department of State support the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)?

**Answer:**

We have a shared interest with China in a stable and prosperous Pakistan. We believe that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to contribute to stability and prosperity in Pakistan and the region, as long as it conforms to international norms with respect to transparency, anti-corruption, environmental and labor standards, foreign participation, and debt sustainability. Any such shortcomings would limit the program's benefits to the Pakistani people. We have encouraged China to ensure its adherence to international norms, so that it can play an important role in expanding and improving Pakistan's infrastructure and promoting power generation projects.

**Question:**

How would you describe China's commitment to U.S. interests in Afghanistan? Have they been supportive of peace and reconciliation in the country?

**Answer:**

China regularly consults with the United States on security and stability in Afghanistan, and we have worked together with Afghanistan and Pakistan to facilitate an Afghan peace process through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group. China also participates in the International Contact Group and other multilateral fora that coordinate international support for Afghanistan. China has consistently expressed its support for an Afghan peace process, and recently offered public support for President Ghani's announcement of the Eid ceasefire.

China has worked to improve Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, particularly through its trilateral format, which we hope will contribute to both sides working cooperatively to counter terrorist groups and to prevent cross-border attacks. We continue to urge China to use its close relationship with Pakistan to push for a substantive and irreversible strategic shift that would see Taliban senior leaders in Pakistan arrested, expelled, or brought to the negotiating table with the Afghan government.

With Chinese exports to Afghanistan (over \$1 billion) far exceeding Chinese imports from Afghanistan (around \$5 million in 2016), China could do more to balance its trade with Afghanistan by increasing development assistance or by importing more Afghan goods.

***Withdrawal from Afghanistan*****Question:**

Under what conditions would the Department of State support negotiations or a negotiated settlement with the Taliban?

**Answer:**

The Administration's overall goal for Afghanistan is to support a negotiated political settlement between the government and the Taliban. Our longstanding position remains that as an outcome of any peace agreement, the Taliban must abandon violence, respect the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities, and break ties with al-Qaida and international terrorism.

**Question:**

What specific steps are the Department of State taking to achieve these conditions?

**Answer:**

The Administration's overall goal for Afghanistan is to support a negotiated political settlement between the government and the Taliban. To this end, we are using all tools, including diplomatic tools, in concert, to support Afghan efforts to reduce violence, support upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, encourage Afghan government reforms, and engage all of Afghanistan's neighbors and near-neighbors to build regional support for the government's efforts to secure peace. This includes development assistance, public affairs and media engagements, counter-narcotics and law enforcement efforts, initiatives to promote human rights and the rule of law, as well as direct diplomatic engagements within Afghanistan, in countries in the region, and in the broader community of donors and NATO partners.

***Visas for Afghan Translators*****Question:**

The United States provides a Special Immigrant Visa for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters who risked their lives to support U.S. forces and diplomats.

- How many Afghan nationals are currently waiting for a visa under this category?
- How many Afghans have been killed while waiting for such visa?

**Answer:**

As of June 2018, there are approximately 17,600 Afghan principal applicants at some stage in the SIV pipeline.

We are committed to supporting those who have helped U.S. military and other government personnel perform their duties often at great personal risk to themselves and their families. The embassy is sometimes notified of an applicant's death from natural causes, violence, or otherwise, although the Department does not officially track such data. Because these applicants often still reside in Afghanistan, we collectively work with our interagency partners to process these cases as quickly as possible.

**Question:**

In the period from January 27, 2017, to March 16, 2017, did the policy enacted by Executive Order 13769 (the Muslim Ban) deny any Iraqi-national recipients of the Special Immigrant Visa for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters the ability to travel to the United States?

**Answer:**

Executive Order 13769 did not apply to any Afghan nationals, including Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants. While E.O. 13769 did apply to certain Iraqi nationals, on January 31, 2017, the Department issued guidance to posts advising consular officers that Iraqi nationals could continue to apply for SIVs and, if the applicants were otherwise qualified, the consular officer could issue SIVs. All admissions data belongs to the Department of Homeland

Security, however, the Department also notified posts on January 31, 2017, that Iraqi SIV holders were able to apply for admission to the United States. On February 3, 2017, the U.S. government ceased implementation of E.O. 13769's visa and entry suspensions per federal court order.

**Question:**

Have any such individuals or Iraqi-national holders of such Special Immigrant Visas been admitted to the United States since March 16?

**Answer:**

The Department does not have access to admissions data for SIV holders as this data belongs to the Department of Homeland Security. From March 2017 through May 2018, the Department issued approximately 336 SIVs for Iraqi principal applicants, and 3,669 SIVs for Afghan principal applicants. In that same time period, the Department issued approximately 956 SIVs for Iraqi derivative applicants (family members) and 15,217 SIVs for Afghan derivative applicants.

**Question:**

Have visas been denied to the spouses or unmarried children under the age of 21 of any such Special Immigrant Visa holder as a result of Executive Order 13769 (Jan 27 2017), Executive Order 13780 (March 6, 2017), Presidential Proclamation 9645, or any other visa restrictions on Iraqi or Afghan nationals implemented since January 20, 2017?

**Answer:**

Afghan nationals, including applicants for Special Immigrant Visas, were not subject to Executive Order (E.O.) 13769, E.O. 13780, or Presidential Proclamation (P.P.) 9645. While certain Iraqi nationals were subject to travel restrictions under E.O. 13769, E.O. 13780 and P.P. 9645 did not impose travel restrictions upon Iraqi nationals. From January 27, 2017 to January 31, 2017, Iraqi SIV applicants were not interviewed and were not able to enter the United States. On January 31, 2017, the Department advised posts that Iraqi SIV applicants found eligible for an SIV could seek entry to the United States with a valid SIV. Iraqi nationals could also apply for SIVs, and, if qualified, could be issued a SIV. Very few Iraqi applicants were affected by Executive Order 13769, and any who were affected were subsequently remedied on January 31, 2017. On February 3, 2017, the U.S. government ceased implementation of any visa and entry restrictions under E.O. 13769 per federal court order.

**Questions for the Record from Representative Thomas R. Suozzi**  
U.S. Policy Towards Afghanistan  
June 20, 2018

While our military spending in Afghanistan is approximately \$45 billion for FY18, the money for the civilian side is seeing a steady decrease. At the 2016 Brussels Conference, the US committed to \$1 billion per year, then reduced its commitment to \$847.6 million in 2017, \$782.8 million in 2018, and is requesting a further reduction to \$632 million for 2019. This is deeply troubling. Furthermore, I am concerned that our civilian commitment and that of our partners is a list, as opposed to a strategy with well thought out goals and objectives.

**Question:**

I would respectfully ask your office to provide the following:

- a) What is the total amount of funding for civilian programs in Afghanistan for FY17, FY18, and proposed for FY19;
- b) A detailed list of these civilian programs in Afghanistan and their budgets, broken down by agency (USAID, DOD, DOJ, Commerce, etc.) that would reflect the totals in item (a);
- c) An explanation of how these programs are meant to further American interests;
- d) Metrics that show whether or not these programs are achieving their goals;
- e) A similar detailed listing of how much and what our partners are spending their money on.

**Answer:**

Our FY 2017 civilian assistance level for Afghanistan is \$847.7 million. The Department has not yet decided allocations for FY 2018. The President's budget request for Afghanistan was \$782.8 million for FY 2018 and \$632.8 million for FY 2019.

Foreign assistance is a critical instrument of the President's South Asia strategy, which seeks to protect our national security interests by facilitating a sustainable political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Civilian assistance helps set the conditions for peace and lasting stability in Afghanistan by bolstering the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Afghan government, undermining the capabilities and influence of the Taliban, and strengthening the social and economic foundations of the country.

Please see our February 15, 2018 and August 17, 2018 letters to your office detailing the range of assistance programs in support of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan and further addressing your questions. The enclosures for each letter contain Sensitive but Unclassified information and will be sent via secure courier separately.