

Opening Statement  
Chairman Mark Souder

“Afghanistan: Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts  
Going Wobbly?”

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy,  
and Human Resources  
Committee on Government Reform

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Good morning, and thank you all for coming. Our Subcommittee continues its oversight work on the impact of Afghan opium poppy production has on the global supply of heroin.

Last year's Afghan opium production was the second highest on record. According to data and maps provided to the Subcommittee by a U.S. intelligence agency, Afghan opium poppy cultivation is soaring, and that the estimates of hectares under cultivation are now approaching the highest level of past production. I am concerned because over 20,000 Americans die every year from drugs, and 7-10% of heroin sold in the U.S. is traced to the Afghan region.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has conducted annual opium poppy surveys in Afghanistan since 1994. The 2003 Survey shows that Afghanistan again produced three-quarters of the world's illicit opium last year, resulting in income to Afghan opium farmers and traffickers on the order of \$2.3 billion, a sum equivalent to half the legitimate GDP of the country. The UNODC concluded that “out of this drug chest, some provincial administrators and military commanders take a considerable share... Terrorists take a cut as well... the longer this happens, the greater the threat to security within the country and on its borders.”

Today we bring into focus a very time-sensitive concern that the British-led effort on eradication of opium poppy is stalled just as the opium harvesting season in the south of Afghanistan is upon us. Reportedly, the weather has been remarkably good for the growth of poppy, and therefore the harvest season is accelerating. The Subcommittee has received disturbing reports that while our British allies were supposed to eradicate a targeted 12,000 acres of opium poppy, they are barely off the ground in Helmand, and have done almost nothing in Nangarhar. According to our sources, there is dithering on agreement on how to measure what is actually being eradicated, which hampers accountability among the governments pledging counternarcotics resources.

Let me be clear – if it is true that there is some degree of footdragging by the British in this complex matter, the U.S. Department of Defense comes off far worse. Let me quote from the House Government Reform Committee’s “Views and Estimates on the Fiscal Year 2005 Budget of the United States,” which was unanimously approved by a vote of the Committee on February 26, 2004:

*Our British allies have identified many Afghan opium-processing plants necessary to the heroin trade. Yet, despite the financing of terrorists and other destabilizing elements from the drug trade, the Department of Defense does not view these as military targets. The Committee urges in the strongest terms for the Department to reconsider, and will monitor this issue incident to its oversight activities on behalf of the public safety. Therefore, if the Department is unwilling or otherwise task-saturated and unable to fulfill its authorizations, the Committee would support the President’s requested reduction with the proviso that the funds be redistributed to other agencies capable of filling the void.*

Let me conclude by saying this: I am tough on everyone working the difficult mission of counternarcotics in Afghanistan because the stakes are so high. I met with both the former King and President Karzai in Kabul. Both told me and the other members of Congress who were there that elimination of the drug trade is vital to the future of Afghanistan. They agreed with the assessment of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime that “There is a palpable risk that Afghanistan will again turn into a failed state, this time in the hands of drug cartels and narco-

terrorists...” We owe it to the people of Afghanistan, and the people of the United States, to make sure that does not happen.