**House Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Adam Smith**

**Opening Remarks**

[**Full Committee Hearing on U.S. “Defense Strategy in South Asia”**](https://democrats-armedservices.house.gov/hearings?ID=BE888E80-B6A7-49B9-9427-FDE24F308AEF)

**October 3, 2017 – Video Link:** <https://goo.gl/PDKEoy>

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing. I also wish to welcome Secretary Mattis and General Dunford and to thank each of them for appearing today on short notice. Their insight will be instrumental to our evaluation of the Trump Administration’s new policy for Afghanistan and South Asia.

            In August, the President announced that the United States would expand military efforts to stabilize Afghanistan as part of a broader regional security initiative. In doing so, he restated several familiar national security objectives, which include preventing Afghanistan from becoming a haven from which terrorist attacks can be staged, preventing weapons of mass destruction from falling into terrorist hands, and supporting Afghan establishment of a sustainable peace through political reconciliation. The President also confirmed that the U.S. military will continue to conduct counter terrorism operations in Afghanistan and to train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces in support of a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to security in the region. None of that is new.

            The policy changes that the President highlighted included reverting to a conditions-based approach to conducting military operations, expanding authorities for the U.S. military to conduct those operations, demanding that Pakistan demonstrate greater commitment to combatting terrorism, and encouraging India to play a more prominent role in Afghanistan.

            Unfortunately, the Administration has not yet adequately explained how it will achieve its policy objectives. Simply committing to an intensified, open-ended application of U.S. military force does not constitute a sufficient plan for addressing the vast array of complex regional challenges. Yet, it remains unclear how increased military pressure will complement diplomatic and development efforts to provide sustainable security in the region.

            Moreover, the Administration’s South Asia strategy raises numerous questions. For example, what are the new strategy’s inherent costs and risks? What authorities have been or will be granted? What conditions would be conducive to peace, security, and a reduced U.S. presence in Afghanistan?  What qualifies as success, regarding American involvement in Afghanistan, beyond the counterterrorism context? How will this Administration manage our relationship with Pakistan differently to foster more productive cooperation?  And, if, as the President has stated, “our commitment is not unlimited, and our support is not a blank check,” what conditions and limitations has the Administration placed on maintaining further U.S. involvement?

            My hope is that this hearing will provide better detail as to how the Administration intends to implement its policy for Afghanistan and South Asia.  After sixteen consecutive years of conflict in Afghanistan, we owe it to the American public to be exacting in our scrutiny.

            Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  I look forward to our witnesses’ testimony.