

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

From Senator Charles Grassley, U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control

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Dear Senator Grassley:

I am glad to be able to further address the Caucus through my written response below to your questions submitted to me for the record and to elaborate on counternarcotics strategies in Afghanistan and their effects on U.S national security and the future of Afghanistan.

1. In your written testimony, you outlined the problems with eradication efforts but then included eradication as one of your final recommendations. However, in your argument you indicate that eradication “should only be adopted in areas free of conflict and where sufficient legal economic alternatives are available to the population.”

- *Would you please expound further on how, in today’s Afghanistan, how one would go about designating which areas are free of conflict and possess sufficient economic alternatives to poppy farming?*

A determination of whether the two necessary conditions that will make eradication effective – sufficient security and availability of the necessary economic resources for legal economic activity to take place – are present in any particular locality in Afghanistan would entail a detailed ground assessment by international advisors and Afghan government officials and comprehensive and repeated consultation with the local community.

The basic criteria for whether a sufficient security is present are: first, whether local residents can go unmolested about their everyday business and second, whether international NGOs and advisors (such as civilian advisors from PRTs) can freely travel to communities and engage with the local population. The indices of the first criterion include, for example, that people feel safe to walk on the street, travel between the provincial or district capital and their home, and do so without paying extensive bribes; that children are attending schools and play on the streets, that businesses are not shuttered and bazaar activity is taking place; that people engage in a conversation in the open with international interlocutors and Afghan national security forces. Such security to be able to conduct every-day business does not necessarily include the total absence of violence or a positive feeling toward international forces or the Afghan national government.

The basic criterion for whether sufficient economic resources are available in the locality is whether all structural drivers of illicit crop cultivation have been addressed. Although these structural drivers will frequently vary depending on local conditions, some general indices can be offered.

These include (but are not exclusive to):

- *sufficient food security*;
- *access to legal microcredit* (i.e., the ability to obtain microcredit without having to resort to poppy cultivation or another illegal economic activity);
- *access crops to land without having to grow illicit crops* (i.e., the ability to rent land as a sharecropper or a tenant without having to pay back in opium);
- *access to markets*, which includes both physical access, such as safe roads without the need to pay bribes to extralegal and illegal entities or prohibitive tolls to the state), but also political access, such as that a particular ethnic group or tribe is not prohibited from entering and participating in economic activity in a particular market;
- *availability of value-added chains and sufficient demand in internal and external markets*;
- *presence of sufficient employment opportunities*, including off-farm income options;
- *availability of other necessary inputs*, such as irrigation system, fertilizers, seeds, etc.

The availability of such resources does not require that legal economic activity, including legal agricultural production, is already taking place. In fertile, relatively developed areas where legal markets are available and accessible, eradication can be undertaken and be the necessary trigger to switch the population to legal production. In Afghanistan, such areas have been usually within 20 kilometers of provincial capitals, such as around Jalalabad in Nangarhar, Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh, and Fayzabad in Badakhshan. Unfortunately, spreading insurgency and growing insecurity due to street-level criminality have critically undermined security and legal markets even in these areas. Nonetheless, when these provincial capitals and surrounding areas had sufficient security three, four years ago, eradication of illicit crops encouraged a sustainable switch to legal crops since sufficient, and even more profitable legal markets were available. The growing insecurity even in many of those areas – caused by the Taliban spread as a result of insufficient counterinsurgent forces, such as in Balkh, or by premature and counterproductive eradication elsewhere in the province, generating social instability, street criminality, and enabling Taliban mobilization and leaking into the provincial capital, such as in Nangarhar -- has been undermining the viability of legal markets and hence resistance to poppy cultivation.

Nor is the presence of multi-cropping systems where opium poppy cultivation is only one component on its own an indication of sufficient resources. Because of high land intensity, with large families dependent on small plots of land, and a growing land concentration further worsening this trend, many families do not have enough land to grow enough food to cover their needs through the cultivation of wheat, for example, and are dependent on cash crops, such as opium poppy. Consequently, most will cultivate food crops in addition to poppy. It is only the poorest and the richest who will monocrop opium poppies since their cultivation is extraordinarily labor-intensive and hence costly in terms of labor-hours required.

But the bottom-line is that a determination of whether such structural drivers have indeed been addressed through development or preexisting conditions in the locality cannot be undertaken in the absence of detailed and comprehensive local-level studies of what drives cultivation in a particular locale.

2. *A main tenant of President Obama's proposed Counternarcotics Strategy is to end eradication efforts and focus resources on interdiction and alternative development. I am concerned that this leaves the President's strategy without an effective method of punishment or enforcement for program participants.*

- *A. What, if any, effort is being made to ensure that farmers who receive funding for alternative development programs do not continue to grow poppy?*
- *B. What alternative development programs have shown the greatest promise and are any of them as lucrative as poppy production?*

A. I am not a member of the Administration and consequently I am not privy to the entire design of the counternarcotics strategy. I have not heard a detailed discussion of what enforcement mechanisms will be put in place at the cultivation level. My understanding is that the operationalization of the strategy is still being worked out – not simply with respect to enforcement, but also with respect to how the alternative development effort will be conceptualized. Even with respect to interdiction, the United States Department of Defense has designated fifty high-value targets – fifty drug traffickers known to be also key supporters or members of the Taliban insurgency-- but other discussions are still underway with respect to what other interdiction measures will be carried out, by whom, and whether they will also target drug traffickers linked to the Afghan government or lower-level traffickers.

What I can offer are some general best-practice lessons. When legal economic alternatives are available and security is present, some farmers may well be willing to abandon illicit crop cultivation in the absence of law enforcement for several reasons: Many farmers want to get out of insecurity that the cultivation of illicit crops carries with it – not simply in terms of law enforcement, but also by pulling in criminal or insurgent groups. This general desire to enhance one's human security by being a legal and accepted member of the community and citizen of the state can become more important once one's food security and economic survival and subsistence have been legally assured. In Afghanistan, this desire will likely be reinforced by a general perception that poppy cultivation is problematic with respect to the Koran's tenants.

Nonetheless, some farmers will likely persist in illicit crop cultivation in the absence of a threat of eradication. It is here where appropriately sequenced eradication program will be important and effective, but should be undertaken after an assessment that sufficient resources (as discussed above) are available, with input from the local community. Rather than completely forswearing eradication, U.S. counternarcotics policy in Afghanistan (and elsewhere) would be enhanced by a general declaration of the following operating principle: *The cultivation of illicit crops is illegal and undesirable for the well-being of the society and indeed individual citizens. Great economic and security deprivation nonetheless force many to participate in this activity. The international community and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan understand the difficult circumstances and human security needs of the Afghan people and will help them address the structural drivers of poppy cultivation. Once there has been a determination that in any particular locality the structural drivers have been addressed, counternarcotics efforts become principally the domain of law enforcement and eradication will be an appropriate and likely response.*

However, it is ineffective and counterproductive to condition economic assistance on the a priori eradication of illicit crops. Given the economic dependence of most poppy farmers on opium poppy cultivation, the families will simply not have enough economic assets to be able to exist until alternative development efforts start producing resources and income. Moreover, such conditioning will ignore other structural drivers, such as access to microcredit and land, thus de facto guaranteeing that farmers will not be able to switch to legal crops. They will become all the more indebted, lose productive assets, and hence will be all the more dependant on poppy cultivation. Many instances of such counterproductive conditionality abound in Afghanistan as well as elsewhere in the world. Indeed, similar policies in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, such as, for example, the zero-coca policy of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, perversely guarantees that localities that already have resources for legal cultivation qualify for aid after first eradicating all crops in a municipality, while the poorest, most marginalized, and most dependent on poppy never qualify for aid since they cannot eradicate without assured income and means to address structural drivers of illicit crop cultivation. Since rural development takes time, there is an inevitable lag between eradication (which can destroy crops overnight) and when alternative livelihoods efforts start generating income to even cover food security. In most instances, what follows is great economic emiseration of the illicit crop farmers, including in terms of food security, with which many fail to cope without resorting to illicit crop cultivation. Under such circumstances, many farmers sour on the idea of “alternative livelihoods” and reject state presence. Illegal activity and root causes of violent conflict thus perpetuate themselves.

Indeed, the greatest success of alternative development - in both relative and absolute terms - has taken place in Thailand where the sequencing of counternarcotics intervention was the one suggested here: First, security was established. Second, comprehensive rural development was undertaken for several years without forced eradication. Third, as resources for legal livelihoods became available, eradication was initiated and became a part of the strategy alongside continuing rural development. Thailand’s poppy cultivation went down to zero. It needs to be stressed that the effort was well-designed as comprehensive rural development, well-resourced, and took many years during which Thailand’s overall economy grew rapidly and stimulated robust job creation.

B. Rural development in Afghanistan is no doubt greatly complicated by the paucity of economic resources and capital and the extraordinarily low human capital. Inevitably, while counternarcotics efforts should be couched and well-integrated into a comprehensive economic and state-building strategy, the dominant labor-intensive growth potential is currently in agriculture. While support should be given to the development of at least small-scale industry, such as textiles and carpets, agricultural production is likely to dominate development and job creation efforts for the foreseeable future. The focus on agriculture should nonetheless be complemented to the extent possible by focusing on off-farm job creation, such as in small-scale rural infrastructure.

In devising an appropriate rural development effort, addressing profitability of crops is only one necessary component. Price profitability is only one driver of illicit crop cultivation and frequently not the dominant one. Other structural drivers already discussed need to be addressed. Price profitability of illegal crops frequently, but not always, surpasses the price profitability of legal crops. In Thailand, for example, flowers and apricots were at times more profitable than

poppy; in Pakistan onion proved more profitable than poppy while in Lebanon it was garlic. Even in Afghanistan today, legal fruits and vegetables, including okra, cabbage, and at times onions, can be more profitable than opium -- depending on a host of factors, such as market saturation with any particular commodity and the labor-intensiveness of its cultivation, which on the one hand provides employment, but on the other also imposes substantial labor costs on households.

The goal of alternative development efforts should not be to match or surpass the price of illicit crops, but to generate enough income and employment at the household level to address subsistence needs and enable further economic development of households so as to provide them with the potential to increase their standard of living.

While the optimal cropping portfolios will vary region-by-region, overall the appropriate substitution crops are *high-value, high-labor-intensive crops cultivated in a multi-cropping diversified cropping system*, such as almonds and other nuts, raisins, saffron, and other fruits, spices, and vegetables, but also okra, tomatoes, taro, and onions. The substitution strategy should focus on maximizing the twin objectives of generating high income as well as high employment. And it needs to be appropriate with respect to other structural drivers, such as land availability. Wheat, for example, is a distinctly inappropriate substitution crop for most of Afghanistan since land intensity problems and small landholdings result in the inability of most farmers to generate enough food security even with monocropping wheat, nor can relying mainly on wheat cultivation generate extra cash. Moreover, wheat cultivation is much less labor-intensive than poppy cultivation; thus an extensive switch to wheat would increase unemployment in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, including insecurity and the inability to conduct the necessary agricultural studies in Afghanistan and the apparent simplicity of the effort, wheat is by default emerging as a key focus of the rural development effort in Afghanistan.

3. *Security continues to be the main impediment to the success of counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan and security is especially difficult in poppy-growing regions.*

- *What impact will the deteriorating security situation have on the development and implementation of the alternative livelihood and interdiction programs as proposed by the Administration?*
- *What solutions would you recommend for increasing security in the country?*

The lack of security is indeed the critical impediment to counternarcotics efforts. The lack of security undermines and eviscerates not only rural development efforts, but also eradication efforts. In the absence of security, eradication teams may not be able to operate on the ground, and aerial spraying may become the only option. However, without robust rural development and alternative livelihoods being in place, spraying (as well as ground eradication) will only strengthen insurgent and terrorist groups and hence violent conflict. Moreover, the physical effectiveness of the effort to destroy the crops will also be limited as farmers will move cultivation to other areas, otherwise conceal illicit crop cultivation, or replant after eradication. Indeed, no counternarcotics efforts – whether through rural development or forced eradication –

were ever able to robustly and in a lasting way suppress illicit crop cultivation in the absence of security and state control over territory. The renowned successes in Thailand, China, Burma, Lebanon, and to a lesser degree Peru in the late 1990s came only after security was established. At the same time, despite the extensiveness of forced manual eradication and aerial spraying, coca cultivation in Colombia today persists at approximately the same levels as before extensive eradication was undertaken, due to a continuing lack of security and state presence and continuing lack of legal economic opportunities in much of Colombia. Overall, counternarcotics efforts will suffer from a lack of security and will be weakened by a further deterioration of security in Afghanistan.

Improving security in Afghanistan is a complex and multifaceted task. It includes several components all of which must strive to involve the local community as much as possible:

- ***An increase in security forces to be able to protect the population and provide for its human security needs.*** While local Afghan forces would be the optimal counterinsurgent forces if well-trained and available in sufficient numbers, currently there are limits to both their capabilities and size. While increasing the production of Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police is imperative; there are limits to how fast this can be accomplished. Quality cannot be sacrificed to the goal of quantity, since badly trained and predatory Afghan government security forces will only feed the insurgency. Given that the current force levels – Afghan and international – are not sufficient to improve security, increasing U.S. and NATO forces by substantial numbers is an inescapable requirement.

However, the need to improve security and the difficulty of generating the necessary resources to do so should not result in seductive shortcuts, such as raising militias. While peeling off individual fighters or entire tribes from the Taliban insurgency is desirable, they should be subsequently demobilized. Employing them as militias to fight the committed Taliban will not generate the expected payoffs in terms of short-term tactical gains since the tribal structures are weak and militarily inferior to the Taliban and have systematically been defeated by the Taliban on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Moreover, it will generate great medium-term problems by worsening the quality of governance in Afghanistan, empowering problematic and predatory powerbrokers, undermining state-building in Afghanistan, and intensifying fissiparous tendencies in the country.

- ***Improvements in Afghan governance.*** This is the greatest challenge for the United States and the international community in Afghanistan. Governance in Afghanistan is poor because of both poor local capacity and human capital and because of predatory behavior on the part of Afghanistan's powerbrokers and members of government and government forces, such as the police. Corruption is rampant. Efforts to improve governance will need to focus at both national and local levels and should consist of empowering honest and committed officials by channeling as much as assistance and decision-making processes through them and by minimizing interaction with unofficial and problematic powerbrokers and corrupt government officials.

Efforts also need to be made to improve the rule of law and increase the accessibility of justice and dispute resolution mechanisms provided by either the state or local communities, but not by insurgents. International assistance to improve the lack of technical capacity is perhaps the least difficult to generate, despite the fact that even in this area, the international community and the United States are suffering from a critical lack of available personnel. However, how to address corruption is the most difficult problem. It is further elaborated below in Response to Question 4.

Above all, it is necessary to define good governance as administrative activity that improves the lives of the Afghan people in addition to being conducted in a way consistent with the law of the country. Determining whether there is good governance, for example, by the numbers of hectares of poppy eradicated (while such efforts at the same time impoverish, alienate and radicalize the local population) will ultimately be counterproductive and unsustainable. The more incongruent the international community's definition of good governance and legitimacy will be with the definitions and perceptions of the local community, the more unsustainable the effort will be.

- ***Ability to deliver immediate socio-economic improvements to the lives of the Afghan population.*** In the short term, much of the development efforts in the context of immediate military clearing operations will be only be temporary and will more likely be buy-offs than robust development. In some instances, it may even become necessary to undo some of those early “development” projects for sustainable and robust development to take place later on. Nonetheless, there are opportunities to conduct even the quick-impact projects in a more effective way than they are frequently undertaken. Even during conflict or immediate post-clearing operations, the projects should seek to involve the community and be underpinned by community consensus. They should involve the community in its planning and execution rather than simply be conceived as handouts, and should be conducted with an eye toward capacity-building and sustainability rather be sponsor-pleasing white elephants.
- ***Long-term comprehensive development effort.*** Details of this effort have been discussed above with respect to counternarcotics, indicating that a well-designed counternarcotics strategy must be fully integrated into an overall development effort. In addition to some of the micro-efforts described below, it is necessary to focus on overall macro-stability and economic growth that leads to job creation. Consequently, it will be necessary to address any fundamental political-economy obstacles, such as land distribution, for example, that may be in the narrow interest of the old or new elites, but inconsistent with the development and effective state-building objectives. Although many such political economy impediments and deficits are acute in Afghanistan, they are smaller than, for example, in Pakistan. In addition, an effort should be made to channel as much coordinated international assistance as possible through the Afghan government and regularized Afghan budget processes to facilitate development in a way that also strengthens state capacity. The latter is critical for the sustainability and growth of such projects. The National Solidarity Program is one effective model.

4. *Corruption among government, including officials within the Judiciary and Police Corp tasked to address narcotics trafficking, is a significant obstacle to establishing effective counter-narcotics programs throughout the country.*

- *What recommendation would you propose to effectively address the rampant corruption that could derail this whole process?*

Fighting corruption is a necessary and painstaking process in Afghanistan. Corruption in Afghanistan today not only facilitates the drug trade, but also drives the Taliban insurgency. It compromises state-building and alienates the local population from the central and local government and, to the extent that corrupt government officials are associated with the international community, also from the international community. Corruption is greatly exacerbated by the drug trade, but predates and goes beyond the drug trade. Indeed, what drives Afghan anger and frustration with corruption is not, for example, toleration of poppy cultivation on the part of Afghan government officials. Rather, it is toleration of poppy cultivation of the rich and powerful members of a community, underpinned by bribes, while the poor farmers bear the brunt of eradication; targeting small opium traders while big well-connected drug traffickers go unpunished; and generalized extortion on the part of government officials in order for any ordinary economic or administrative activity to take place. Corruption is systemic and endemic and to a large extent a result of a collapse of traditional governing structures while new governing capacity and accountability mechanisms are yet to be established.

Given this context, there are no quick or easy fixes. Yet there are some important and immediately available steps for initiating a credible fight against corruption—namely:

- ***Multilayered approach.*** Efforts to combat corruption need to be undertaken at both the national and local levels. At the national level, efforts to strengthen the national anticorruption commission should be undertaken and have been recently endorsed by President Hamid Karzai. To the extent possible, the commission should include international representatives or a separate joint Afghan-international anticorruption body to be established at the national level. Indicting and successfully prosecuting or at least removing from office some of the notoriously corrupt officials will send an important signal that the era of impunity is over. Similar efforts need to be undertaken at the local level since local officials at the district and provincial level are the ones that most Afghans directly experience. Strengthening existing mechanisms, such as the Independent Directorate for Local Governance, may well be one venue, but such efforts need to be cognizant of the frequently problematic record of such mechanisms so far and their susceptibility to being manipulated and corrupted. Consequently, it is necessary to undertake a robust evaluation of their effectiveness so far and devise mechanisms to address their current weaknesses.

- ***Avoiding expectations of purity of commitment and anti-corruption-efforts overreach.*** Given the post-election climate in Afghanistan and the high political indebtedness of most of Afghanistan's top candidates, it is very unlikely that the international community will succeed in pressuring the new government to remove some of its corruption high-value targets, such as Vice-president Elect Mohammad Fahim,

Abdul Rashid Dostum, or Ahmed Wali Karzai. While their absence from high-level government positions would be highly desirable, the international community can deplete much political capital by such demands without any results. However, efforts can and should focus on removing the second-tier facilitators of such powerbrokers, thereby slowly but systematically undermining their influence and possibly generating evidence to prosecute them over time.

At the same time, an effort should be made to empower honest and committed administrators and officials. While sometimes dealing with problematic powerbrokers – whether corrupt government officials and powerbrokers on the outside – will be required for policy decisions and implementation to take place, the necessity of dealing with them and channeling aid through them should be kept to a minimum. While the current political realities in Afghanistan may not be conducive to directly diminishing the power of problematic powerbrokers, their relative power can be weakened by empowering honest and effective officials and strengthening their political capital vis-à-vis the international community and Afghan population.

- ***Improving quality of policing.*** The quality of police forces in Afghanistan is very low, and most Afghans view police as predatory, corrupt thieves. Changing that perception and improving quality will require several elements.

The training of police forces needs to be longer and more multifaceted. Newly trained police should be partnered with international advisors during early phases of deployment. While the focused-district development program is an improvement to previous training efforts, it is still not sufficient. Greater partnering and longer and more robust training, however, require greater numbers of police trainers, which the United States and the international community have been unable to field.

The purpose of police forces should be to prevent crime and enforce the law when crimes are committed. The focus should be on “street” crime and rule-of-law violations that are most frequently experienced by Afghans: illegal tolls, kidnapping, extortion, robberies and theft. However, the role and mission of the police forces need to go beyond checking vehicles for bombs at check points and maintaining public order and to focus also on crime prevention. The emphasis should be on community policing and building trust between the community and local police forces.

Such a thrust in turn requires removing regular street police from both counterinsurgency combat or holding operations and counternarcotics efforts. Currently, the police forces are simply unable to defend themselves against Taliban attacks when they are tasked with holding towns and districts. Their attrition rate is over 25%, and in some areas as much as 40%, thus preventing them from being able to accomplish their mission and undermining their morale and commitment to the mission. If police forces focus on community policing, they will become critical enablers of counterinsurgency efforts by preventing crime, building trust among the local population in the central state, and even obtaining highly-valuable tactical intelligence on the Taliban forces and the placement of IEDs. But to do so, they need to be shielded by military forces against

overwhelming Taliban attacks and removed from direct counterinsurgency operations.

Similarly, placing local police forces in charge of counternarcotics efforts will make them highly susceptible to intimidation and corruption. Indeed, experience from other countries in Asia and Latin America strongly suggests that tasking local police forces with eradication or interdiction in areas with weak law enforcement is highly ineffective. Overall law enforcement capacity, state presence, police force maturation, and build-up of a positive relationship with the community need to take place before local police forces can effectively participate in efforts against organized crime, such as the drug trade.

Counternarcotics operations should be thus left to highly trained and vetted specialized police units under current conditions in Afghanistan. While such units too can be corrupted and captured by drug trafficking organizations, viz., *Los Zetas* in Mexico, their record is nonetheless better than the record of local police forces in anti-high-crime efforts.

Building internal and external oversight mechanisms in the police force is critical. Providing the local community with some oversight and complaint mechanisms is highly valuable for both reducing corruption and building greater trust in the community for law enforcement. Promotions of both beat and higher-level police officers need to be linked to improvements in the rule of law on the street in a particular community, and not to be based on nepotism and favoritism.

- ***Improving availability and quality of judiciary and dispute resolution mechanisms.***

The need to extend justice delivery has already been discussed above. It may well involve both the strengthening and expanding of formal courts in Afghanistan as well as embracing some traditional justice mechanisms and institutions, but great care and selectivity is needed. Many traditional forms of justice are broken and as absent as formal courts. And many are frequently arbitrary, insufficient, and corrupt. The mere fact that they are “traditional” does not make them necessarily legitimate even in rural Afghanistan. It is not only the absence of formal state judicial institutions, but also the weakness of traditional tribal rule of law institutions that permits the Taliban to insert itself into local communities by delivering a “superior” system of justice. The collapse of such traditional institutions was already manifested in the early 1990s and already then a key source of Taliban mobilization.

- ***Aligning law and people’s fundamental human security interests.*** As long as a particular law and its enforcement are fundamentally alien to the elemental human security needs of the people, threatening, for example, their food security and economic survival, very high levels of state coercion will be required to enforce such a law. Apart from raising fundamental questions of human rights protection and legitimacy of the state, implementing such a law will be very materially costly and resource-intensive. A more effective and cost-effective approach focuses less on deterrence and incapacitation of offenders and more on addressing the causes of why people violate a

law and fail to internalize it. A counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan that addresses the systemic drivers of poppy cultivation and the drug trade in the country and properly sequences multifaceted policy interventions will not only help reduce illegality in the country, it will also greatly enhance sustainable and robust state-building there.