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COUNTERTERRORISM

U.S. Agencies Face Challenges Countering the Use of Improvised Explosive Devices in the Afghanistan/Pakistan Region

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G A O

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Chairman Lungren, Ranking Member Clarke, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the collaborative efforts of U.S. agencies to detect and prevent the smuggling into Afghanistan of calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN) fertilizer produced in Pakistan. Approximately 80 percent of the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Afghanistan contain homemade explosives, primarily CAN smuggled from Pakistan. These IEDs have been a major source of fatalities among U.S. troops in Afghanistan and have been used by various insurgent groups in Pakistan to kill thousands of Pakistani civilians and members of Pakistani security forces. U.S. officials recognize the threat posed by the smuggling of CAN and other IED precursors from Pakistan into Afghanistan, and various U.S. departments, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), are assisting Pakistan's government in countering this threat. My remarks today are based on our May 2012 report on this issue.¹

According to the Department of Defense (DOD), CAN is produced in Pakistan at two factories. DOD estimates that about 240 tons of CAN—representing less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the two factories' total annual production capacity—is used by insurgents to make IEDs for use in Afghanistan. When processed and mixed with fuel oil, CAN fertilizer becomes a powerful homemade explosive. DOD officials noted that only a small amount of CAN is required to make powerful IEDs. According to DOD, a 110-pound bag of CAN yields about 82 pounds of bomb-ready explosive material. This small quantity has the capacity to destroy an armored vehicle or detonate 10 small blasts aimed at U.S. forces conducting foot patrols.

Afghanistan outlawed CAN in 2010, but because of demand for CAN as fertilizer and for IEDs, smugglers bring it into the country, for example, on trucks hidden under other goods. Afghanistan and Pakistan face challenges similar to those that the United States and Mexico face in trying to prevent smuggling across sections of our shared border. U.S. officials note that Pakistan maintains two primary border crossings along the approximately 1,500-mile border with Afghanistan, and only a small

¹GAO, *Combating Terrorism: State Should Enhance Its Performance Measures for Assessing Efforts in Pakistan to Counter Improvised Explosive Devices*, [GAO-12-614](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2012).

percentage of the trucks crossing the border are inspected. Our May 2012 report contains a video of activity at border crossings along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Our May 2012 report (1) described the status of U.S. efforts to assist Pakistan in countering IEDs and (2) reviewed the Department of State's (State) tracking of U.S.-assisted efforts in Pakistan to counter IEDs. To describe these efforts, we reviewed documentation from multiple U.S. agencies—including DHS, State, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Justice—to inventory and describe their relevant activities and performance measures. We also interviewed representatives of U.S. agencies and international partners in the United States and Pakistan.²

In summary, we identified four categories of assistance U.S. agencies have provided: (1) counter-IED training and equipment, (2) a counter-IED public awareness campaign, (3) training of border officials, and (4) legal assistance for laws and regulations to counter IEDs and IED precursors. We found that each agency providing counter-IED assistance to Pakistan performs a unique role based on its specialized knowledge and expertise. DHS, for example, takes primary responsibility for border management and customs investigation training. DHS conducts joint regional training and operational exercises for both Pakistani and Afghan border officials, including international border interdiction training and cross-border financial investigation training. DHS also plays a lead role in Program Global Shield to foster cross-border cooperation and initiate complementary border management and customs operations.³ According

²More detail on our scope and methodology is available in the issued report. We conducted this performance audit from October 2011 to May 2012 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

³Program Global Shield is an international effort to counter the smuggling of chemical precursors that could be used to manufacture IEDs, including CAN. The World Customs Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Interpol, and DHS jointly initiated this project in 2010 and established it as a program in June 2011 with funding of about \$5.9 million that State provided through its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, according to the Bureau's Global Shield liaison officer.

to DHS, the main goals of Program Global Shield are (1) to identify and interdict falsely declared explosive precursor chemicals, (2) to initiate investigations of smuggled or illegally diverted IED materials, and (3) to uncover smuggling and procurement networks that foster illicit trade.

According to agency officials, U.S. agencies work through various organizations to coordinate and share information related to assisting Pakistan with counter-IED efforts. These include the following:

- The U.S. Embassy-Pakistan Counter-IED Working Group helps to keep counter-IED efforts a priority. Coordinated by State, the group also includes participants from DHS, DOD, and the Departments of Justice and Agriculture as well as the U.S. Agency for International Development, the British High Commission, and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.
- The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO)⁴ leads DOD's counter-IED efforts by providing intelligence and expertise on IEDs. For example, JIEDDO hosted a global conference on homemade explosives in fall 2011 that was attended by fertilizer producers and representatives from several agencies. JIEDDO conducted several studies and provided technical assistance to fertilizer producers on how they could mark the product to help inhibit smuggling.
- The Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan participates in regular discussions on counter-IED issues with Central Command (CENTCOM), Special Operations Command (SOCOM), JIEDDO, and the Counter-IED Working Group at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan, which includes DHS.

In providing assistance to Pakistan, which adopted a counter-IED strategy in 2011, U.S. agencies have encountered a range of challenges. U.S. officials in Washington, D.C., and Islamabad, Pakistan identified the following key difficulties that hamper the provision of training and equipment.

⁴JIEDDO is an agency of DOD.

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- *Obtaining visas for U.S. officials.* We have previously reported that U.S. officials face delays in obtaining visas to travel to Pakistan.⁵ During our January 2012 meetings at the U.S. Embassy, officials from several agencies told us that it is difficult to obtain visas for U.S. officials, including trainers, to travel to Pakistan. According to officials, visa renewals sometimes take up to 6 weeks, which can force trainers to leave the country until they get their visa renewed. This has sometimes resulted in disruptions and cancelled training courses.
 - *Vetting Pakistani officials to receive U.S. training.* U.S. law requires that U.S. agencies determine whether there is credible evidence of gross violations of human rights by security force units or individuals slated to receive security assistance.⁶ According to U.S. officials, Pakistan must provide in advance the names of individuals who will be receiving U.S. training in order for them to be vetted. In addition U.S. officials stated that Pakistan has not always been timely in releasing the names of officials who are to receive the training, which can create logistics and scheduling difficulties. For example, according to DHS officials, lack of sufficient time to complete the vetting process resulted in the cancellation of a Program Global Shield training session in October 2011.
 - *Ensuring timely delivery of equipment.* Problems clearing customs and other issues have delayed the transfer of counter-IED equipment from the United States to Pakistani forces. For example, as of April 2012, of the 110 IED jammers that DOD procured in 2009 for Pakistan at a cost of about \$22.8 million, 55 jammers were still in Karachi awaiting release from Pakistani customs. The remaining 55 jammers were being kept in storage in the United States until the initial 55 were released.
 - *Reaching agreement on the specifics of U.S. assistance projects.* Efforts by the United States to reach agreement with Pakistan on the

⁵GAO, *Accountability for U.S. Equipment Provided to Pakistani Security Forces in the Western Frontier Needs to Be Improved*, [GAO-11-156R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 15, 2011).

⁶See 22 U.S.C. 2378d regarding assistance furnished under the Foreign Assistance Act or the Arms Export Control Act. For programs funded by DOD appropriations, the provision is limited to training programs and is incorporated annually in the Department of Defense Appropriations Act. See, for example, Pub. L. No. 112-10, Div. A. sec. 8058.

specific terms of assistance projects can be challenging. For example, the United States and Pakistan planned to establish a facility capable of exploiting chemical, technical, biometric, and documentary evidence to enable Pakistan to disrupt insurgent networks. According to DOD officials, once it became clear that the United States and Pakistan could not reach agreement on joint use of the facility, DOD terminated its support for establishing this facility.

In addition to these challenges to U.S. efforts to assist Pakistan, U.S. officials identified several broader challenges to Pakistan's ability to counter IEDs and, more specifically, to suppress the smuggling of CAN and other IED precursors across the Pakistani border with Afghanistan.

- *History of smuggling across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.* Segments of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border remain porous and are difficult to patrol. The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is approximately 1,500 miles long and much of the terrain along the central and northern border is rugged and mountainous. There is a history of smuggling goods in both directions at many points along this porous border.
- *Availability of CAN substitutes for IEDs.* Even if the smuggling of CAN could be suppressed, insurgents can readily use another precursor chemical to make IEDs. According to DOD, other products available in Pakistan—such as potassium chlorate, used in making matches, and urea, another commonly used fertilizer—can also be used to produce IEDs. At a JIEDDO conference on homemade explosives, a panel of experts agreed that insurgents could easily substitute these commodities to make IEDs if it becomes more difficult for them to access CAN.
- *Smuggling of IED precursors into Afghanistan from other bordering countries.* While Pakistan is the principal source of CAN coming into Afghanistan, China and Iran are also reported to be suppliers of IED precursor chemicals. According to State officials, other substitutes for CAN, including potassium chlorate and urea, are exported by countries other than Pakistan.
- *Delay in finalizing Pakistan's National Counter-IED Implementation Plan.* Pakistan's Directorate General for Civil Defense has developed a National Counter-IED Implementation Plan as outlined in the National Counter-IED Strategy. However, as of April 2012, the plan had not been approved due to concerns over resourcing and other issues.

Our May 2012 report also found that U.S. agencies have developed a new performance indicator and three targets to track some U.S. assisted

Pakistani counter-IED efforts. Specifically, State's fiscal year 2013 Mission Strategic and Resource Plan—which is designed to reflect U.S. priorities in Pakistan—includes a performance indicator to monitor Pakistan's implementation of effective measures to prevent illicit commerce in sensitive materials, including chemical precursors used to make IEDs in Afghanistan. To measure progress toward this performance indicator, the plan included three targets: (1) implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement for fiscal year 2011, (2) improved competency of Pakistani customs and border officials and improved monitoring at border stations for fiscal year 2012, and (3) Pakistan's implementation of a real-time truck-tracking system for fiscal year 2013.

While the inclusion of a counter-IED performance indicator and targets to measure progress toward the indicator in the fiscal year 2013 MSRP is a positive step, it does not reflect the broad range of U.S. assisted counter-IED efforts in Pakistan. As a result, our report included a recommendation to State to enhance its counter-IED performance measures to cover the full range of U.S. assisted efforts. State concurred with our recommendation and noted that comprehensive metrics would better enable evaluation of progress in counter-IED efforts in Pakistan. State committed to improve assessment of its programs by looking for ways to broaden the scope of existing metrics in order to better reflect and evaluate interagency participation in counter-IED efforts. In its comments on a draft of our report, DHS noted that it is committed to working with interagency partners to improve capacity for tracking counter-IED efforts in Pakistan.

Chairman Lungren, Ranking Member Clarke, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

For further information on this statement, please contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331. In addition, contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement.

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