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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON
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PRESS RELEASE

Opening Statement of Congressman Todd Akin *Oversight & Investigations Subcommittee Hearing on the Role of the* *Department of Defense in Provincial Reconstruction Teams*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Todd Akin (R-MO), senior Republican on the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, today released the following opening statement for the subcommittee’s hearing on the Department of Defense’s role in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT):

“Today’s hearing begins a new inquiry for this subcommittee—the role of the Department of Defense in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. While this is a new topic for the subcommittee, PRTs and the subject of stabilization operations is very much related to our previous work on the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraq alternatives hearing series the subcommittee conducted this past July.

“A PRT is an interagency team, comprised of civilian and military personnel employed in Iraq or Afghanistan with the mission of extending the reach of the government into regional provinces and local areas. While each PRT has a fair amount of autonomy to tailor its work to the needs of their province, it is important to note that PRTs in Iraq and Afghanistan do not have the same emphasis. As I understand it, Afghan PRTs focus on classic development projects, such as improving road networks, adding to the supply of electricity or water, and building schools and clinics. PRTs in Iraq, by contrast, place a stronger emphasis on capacity building rather than reconstruction. Capacity building is defined as mentoring and training in good governance with the emphasis on building and growing local and provincial government.

“In my view, developing capacity in the provinces and assisting in the generation of local governance is absolutely critical to success in Iraq. Much of the recently reported progress in Iraq has occurred at the provincial and local levels, and PRTs would seem to be an appropriate capability to capitalize on this success. The debate in Washington is too focused on measuring progress at the national level—emphasizing a top down approach to governance. One needs to look no further than our own national history to see that the seed of effective governance is sewn at the local level. In my view, we’re beginning to see the emergence of organic Iraqi governance at the provincial level. As this subcommittee investigates the PRTs, I’d like to learn more about how the PRTs are advancing the development and maturation of local governance.

“Finally, another aspect of the PRTs which I’m interested in is the interagency composition of the teams. I’d like to hear from today’s witnesses their views on whether the PRTs are or should be a model for how to conduct interagency operations. While I know that PRTs face a number of challenges, I’m curious whether our witnesses believe that the teams are executing interagency operations effectively. We often hear that Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom require ‘all elements of national power’, though I think it’s been the exception—not the rule—when this has happened. This investigation should look into whether PRTs have the right mix of interagency expertise; clarify which agencies are underrepresented; and offer suggestions for what PRTs should look like.”

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