

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman John F. Kerry**  
**Opening Statement At Hearing On Yemen**  
**January 20, 2010**

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WASHINGTON, D.C.--Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) delivered the following opening statement at a hearing on Yemen:

*Full text as prepared is below:*

Today we are here to discuss al Qaeda in Yemen, and the choices ahead for U.S. policy toward a nation whose challenges are daunting and numerous. But our thoughts and sympathy are with the people of Haiti, whose country has been shattered by an earthquake. Our doctors, troops, aid workers and volunteers are racing to reach those in desperate need, and Americans are making record donations. Next week this Committee will hold a hearing to review our response. But today we are sending our condolences and—urgently—our help to the Haitian people.

This Administration and many on this Committee have long been concerned by the threat posed by al Qaeda's beachhead in Yemen. In fact, by Christmas, the Administration had already begun partnering with Yemen's government to go on offense against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Al Qaeda's presence in Yemen may not be new, but it is evolving. Last January, Saudi and Yemeni al Qaeda branches merged to form al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or "AQAP." In May, an AQAP bomber traveled from Yemen to launch a failed assassination attempt against a Saudi prince. Then, the foiled Christmas Day attack revealed AQAP's ambition to launch terrorist operations not just regionally, but globally and against America.

Last night, the Foreign Relations Committee released a staff report on terrorism in Yemen and Somalia that reveals troubling new dimensions of the threat. According to U.S. law enforcement officials, over the past year, as many as three dozen American ex-convicts have traveled to Yemen upon release from prison. They reportedly went to study Arabic, but several have since disappeared, raising concerns that they may have gone to al Qaeda camps for training. U.S. and Yemeni officials are also concerned about the whereabouts and intentions of a smaller group of Americans who have moved to Yemen, adopted a radical form of Islam, and married local women. As our enemies' tactics evolve, we need to keep up—and that includes taking a close look at the unique threat posed by American recruits into al Qaeda.

We must recognize that al Qaeda is also just one of several profound, interlocking threats that Yemen faces. Consider how Yemen might look like in 2030: Its population has doubled, but its oil wells have disappeared and water has run dry. The central government, sapped by civil wars in the north and south, no longer exerts power outside a few population centers. Millions of refugees, many illiterate and unskilled, are pouring out into the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

And Al Qaeda is now deeply woven into Yemeni tribal society, having married into tribes and set up a network of schools and humanitarian aid in places forgotten by the central government.

This scenario can be averted, but we need to craft a strategy that addresses our immediate, uncompromising need to go after al Qaeda while also ensuring that Yemen is not more dangerous in 2030 than it is today.

First, the Administration is right to ratchet up our development and military aid in return for greater cooperation from President Saleh and his government. But we also need to enlist the help of others. Saudi aid dwarfs that of all other donors, including our own—and so does their leverage. The key will be to match Arab resources and local knowledge with Western technical and development expertise. Next week's London ministerial meeting on Yemen is a crucial chance to begin formulating an effective, coordinated effort commensurate with the scale of the challenge.

Second, we need to be smart about how our actions are felt on the ground. Anti-Americanism runs deep in Yemen, and a narrow focus on al-Qaeda risks stoking resentment, raising al-Qaeda's profile and limiting the government's ability to sustain a partnership with us. If our development efforts can deliver concrete benefits not just to the ruling elite, but to a Yemeni society hungry for better job prospects, that will undercut the appeal of the extremist narrative. USAID's new assistance strategy to address the drivers of Yemen's instability is an important starting point. Government partnership, strong support from the international community, and a targeted approach focused on local institutions will also be vital ingredients of any future success.

Third, we have to be realistic about Yemen's current capacity to fight al-Qaeda, and commit ourselves to improving it over time. Even before Christmas, the Yemeni military had begun taking the fight to al-Qaeda. But over time, nothing would do more to move counterterrorism further up the Yemeni government's priority list—not to mention dramatically improving Yemen's long-term prospects—than finding a way to turn down the temperature on the Houthi rebellion in the north and civil unrest in the south.

The Houthi conflict is not primarily sectarian in nature, but as it drags on, it risks expanding into a regional proxy war. Most see no military solution to this conflict. We should work with the international community to contain the fighting, ensure that humanitarian supplies reach its victims, and eventually address its root causes. Likewise in southern Yemen, we must find ways to encourage President Saleh to address longstanding grievances before unrest becomes insurgency.

Finally, we should view the threat posed by AQAP in the context of a global challenge. Al Qaeda's affiliates demand our attention, but the movement's nerve center remains in Pakistan.

Many in Washington have recently begun a crash course in Yemen. We are fortunate to have with us today several genuine experts who have been studying Yemen for decades.

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