

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement For Hearing On Civilian Strategy For Afghanistan
January 21, 2010

Chairman Kerry Statement At Hearing On Civilian Strategy For Afghanistan

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

Full text as prepared is below:

We are delighted to have David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, here with us today. We have worked closely together on Afghanistan and a variety of other issues, and I am pleased to call the Foreign Secretary and his wife Louise my friends. Following the Foreign Secretary, we will hear from a familiar and respected presence before this Committee, the President's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. He is here to discuss the Administration's new "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy."

Today's hearing comes in the lead-up to the London international conference next week, which will focus on strengthening and coordinating all of our non-military efforts in Afghanistan. I look forward to hearing from both witnesses about what can be accomplished in London and beyond.

We all recognize the enormous sacrifices that the United Kingdom has made in Afghanistan, especially in the turbulent south at the heart of the Taliban insurgency. Some 250 British soldiers and civilians have given their lives since 2001. We are enormously grateful for their contribution to our shared security—and to you and Prime Minister Brown for your continued commitment to our shared mission.

In December, the President explained his decision to send additional troops to Afghanistan. As I said then, and as the President knows well, no purely military strategy in Afghanistan can succeed.

The military is only one component in defeating an insurgency. That is why, at every turn, we need to empower Afghans to take control of their future. That rationale guided the conditions I set out for the deployment of new troops, which I believe still hold today: the presence of reliable Afghan partners, both political and military, and the civilian capacity to make our military gains sustainable. As additional troops arrive and a new strategy is implemented, this Committee will closely monitor our progress and our plans. Let me be clear: as the United States and our coalition partners increase our troops in Afghanistan, we and our partners are also sending more civilians to translate their efforts into lasting gains for the people of Afghanistan. But this civilian surge will also demand strong, coordinated and cooperative leadership and participation from all of our allies. Next week's London conference is a real opportunity for the international community to commit itself to a coherent civilian strategy and a unified purpose.

Ultimately, nothing will do more to bring success than helping to build effective Afghan institutions and leadership. At President Karzai's inaugural, he renewed his commitment to strengthening the government's capacity, pushing for lasting reforms, and addressing the problems caused by corruption at every level. He made these promises not just to the United States and other key donors, but—more importantly—to the Afghan people.

The coming weeks will tell us a great deal about the depth of President Karzai's commitment to reform. His selection of cabinet officials is cause for both hope and concern: effective officials were chosen for a number of key seats, but others did not always appear to be selected on the merits. One positive sign is that the Afghan Parliament, which rejected several Cabinet nominees, is playing its intended role as a check on the executive branch.

We can also expect new political challenges ahead: Parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place this year but absent real electoral reforms and an improved security climate, we risk repeating the problems that plagued the presidential contest in August. I am eager to hear from our witnesses what efforts are underway to improve the process.

Better governance outside of Kabul is also vital. Real reform means appointing effective leaders at the provincial and district level: they—and officials carrying out their orders—are the only point of contact that most Afghans have with their government. A new survey by the United Nations found that one of every two Afghans paid a bribe to a public official in the last year. Graft has become a part of everyday life, and that must stop.

Alongside better governance, our civilian strategy needs to promote basic sustainable development. Many of us have expressed concerns about undertaking an unrealistic nation-building mission in one of poorest countries on earth. But if we can provide basic economic development to meet pressing needs, we will go a long way toward winning over the Afghan people and preventing the Taliban from exploiting popular frustrations. That is why we must support projects with a proven track-record of success, like the National Solidarity Program, which has earned praise from Afghans and international observers alike. Extending this bottom-up strategy should be a top development priority for the new Afghan government.

President Karzai and his new team can play an important role defining Afghan priorities for international aid, giving new meaning to the Afghan National Development Strategy approved by President Karzai in 2008 as the Afghan blueprint for security, governance, and development.

Finally, as we continue to improve our civilian partnership, we should recognize that we have already accomplished a great deal together. For example, USAID, in partnership with the British Department for International Development, and the Afghan government, have turned the two-kilometer gravel Bost airstrip into a bustling civilian tarmac that will create enormous new economic possibilities for the people of Helmand for years to come.

We are all committed to succeeding in Afghanistan, and strengthening partnerships with key allies like the United Kingdom will be central to that effort. I look forward to hearing from Foreign Secretary Miliband about the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Ambassador Holbrooke has been a friend to this Committee for years, and I appreciate his choosing this forum to unveil the Administration's new "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy."

This new report sets out key initiatives, specific milestones, and resource requirements needed to meet these goals. Many in Congress have been awaiting a formal plan for the civilian side of our efforts, and I am pleased that the Administration has put such care and attention into shaping this one.

Of course, success in Afghanistan will be profoundly affected by what happens across the border, in Pakistan. I welcome this chance to hear your thoughts on Pakistan's progress toward meeting its security, economic and governance challenges.

We also appreciate receiving the first report mandated by the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Pakistan bill, which has been an important and useful source of greater transparency and accountability for how American money will be spent over the next five years.

Changing realities on the ground in both Afghanistan and Pakistan will be a formidable task, but one where success will pay real dividends for America's future security. Ambassador Holbrooke, we look forward to your insights.

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