

United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

WASHINGTON, DC

April 18, 2013

Menendez Press Office

(202) 224-4744



Chairman Menendez's Opening Statement at SFRC Hearing with Secretary of State Kerry

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch the hearing live, or visit:

<http://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/national-security-and-foreign-policy-priorities-in-the-fy-2014-international-affairs-budget>

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Robert Menendez, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is currently presiding over a full committee hearing regarding national security and foreign policy priorities in the FY 2014 international affairs budget. The witness for the hearing is Secretary of State John F. Kerry.

Chairman Menendez's remarks as prepared for delivery are below:

Welcome back, Mr. Secretary. First, let me say, I know how important the Boston Marathon is to you and everyone in Massachusetts and New England. But New Englanders are resilient and I know -- next year -- Patriot's Day and the Boston Marathon will be bigger and better than ever. Our thoughts are with everyone in Boston today.

Again, welcome back. In the two-and-a-half months since you were sworn-in, you've spent 31 days traveling to 17 countries, logged in over 55,000 miles, and made many headlines along the way.

There was one headline in that time that affected all of us deeply -- as I know it affected you. Anne Smedinghoff, an upbeat 25 year old diplomat whom you met, was tragically killed in service in Afghanistan. Her life was a tribute to all those dedicated to something bigger than themselves. It underscores the importance of service to this nation and to people around the world who look to us for leadership. Her death is a stark reminder that part of our duty is to provide those who serve abroad with everything they need to do their jobs -- and to keep them safe and secure in carrying out America's priorities.

Today, Mr. Secretary, we look forward, as always, to hearing the State Department's priorities, as well as the Administration's – and, of course, letting you know ours. Our policy focus is not only on budgetary items, but also on taking action to demonstrate U.S. leadership and improve lives through cooperation with other states, an example being the Disabilities Treaty which would – without cost – improve the lives of thousands of people overseas, as well as Americans with disabilities who travel abroad.

We are all committed to strong American leadership, and the need has never been greater. Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, Cuba, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Korea, climate change, nuclear proliferation, the Arab Spring – all require our full attention. Some require greater attention. Some require specific action; and some may require changes in approach as we look around the world.

As we heard in testimony here last week, violence in Syria has already displaced 4 million people, resulted in more than 1 million refugees, and threatens to further destabilize the Middle East – which brings up another issue and that is arming the Syrian opposition -- and I'd like to hear your views on whether or not you believe we should be providing military aid to vetted opposition forces we identify, stopping short of providing weapons that could threaten our own security if they fall into the wrong hands. And Syria isn't the only humanitarian crisis. In the Sahel, severe drought has displaced more than 300,000 people and affected 9 million more, and 13 million people have been affected by drought in the Horn of Africa. These humanitarian disasters demand active and engaged U.S. diplomacy and assistance – which depend on robust funding of the international affairs account.

At the same time, we understand the budget realities we face and the need to make smart decisions in choosing the most effective and efficient programs that will yield the greatest security return on our investment. We may live in a constrained budget environment, but the world goes on. National security needs are not bound by any constraints, budgetary or otherwise. They continue and meeting them requires clear thinking and difficult choices. We will have to rebalance and scale-down operations in certain areas, as we scale-up in others. I look forward to your views on how we strike the balance in making these trade-offs.

An example is funding for Western Hemisphere programs. I fully support efforts to increase funding for the Asia-Pacific rebalance and applaud the administration for a budget proposal that included an increase for East Asia and the Pacific... but as important as East Asia and the Pacific are, I hope it does not come at the expense of other priorities – like Latin America. I'm concerned with sharp cuts to Western Hemisphere, and what this may say about a lack of a coherent U.S. strategy. The FY14 budget proposes a 14 percent, \$253 million cut in aid to the region. Some of that decrease is because we are engaging with increasingly capable partners and our activities are less resource intensive.

In Mexico, we are transitioning the Merida Initiative on security cooperation from a focus on equipment to technical assistance on the rule of law and local capacity building. But, again, I hope we are circumspect in how we go about striking the proper balance and

that we don't overlook the very severe security crisis in Central America. I hope you will address what we gain and what we potentially give up as we make these decisions.

To address the humanitarian needs in Syria I mentioned, we are already providing \$385 million in humanitarian support, but, even in this difficult fiscal climate – we could dramatically increase that number to help end one of the region's most devastating humanitarian tragedies unfolding as we speak. Making that choice would, in my view, be a positive step not only for the Syrian people, but it would signal to other donors that this is not business as usual. I'm anxious to hear your views on the prospect of increasing aid, as well as an answer to the question I raised at our hearing on Syria that no one seemed to address -- and that is: What, in your view, does a realistic political solution in Syria look like? And have we already moved beyond that point?

I'm also interested in a fuller understanding of the Department's approach to implementation of the Accountability Review Board's recommendations to meet embassy security goals balanced against the need for our diplomats to freely operate and do their jobs.

Lastly, Mr. Secretary, I'm interested in your views on how this budget reflects the priorities of diplomatic statecraft as economic statecraft, and how the budgetary choices we make could help the State Department create jobs and economic opportunities at home.

With that, Mr. Secretary, it's good to welcome you back. I look forward to your comments.

###