

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman John F. Kerry**  
**July 20, 2010**

**Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At Nomination Hearing For U.S.  
Ambassador To Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, And Turkey**

**Washington, DC** – This afternoon, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a nomination hearing for U.S. ambassadorial nominees to Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Turkey.

*The full text of his statement as prepared is below:*

We're here today to consider the nominations of four career professionals to serve in crucial postings. On our first panel, we will hear from Ambassador James Jeffrey, who has been nominated to serve as Ambassador to Iraq. On our second panel, we will hear from Ambassador Francis Ricciardone, for Turkey; Maura Connelly for Lebanon; and Gerald Feierstein for Yemen.

Few Americans know Iraq better than today's nominee. Ambassador Jeffrey has served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad and as coordinator for Iraq policy at both the White House and State Department. Most recently he served as Ambassador to Turkey. He's also a native of Melrose, Massachusetts, so I'm especially pleased to welcome him here today.

For the first time in seven years, Iraq no longer represents our largest overseas troop presence. We remain on track to be below 50,000 troops by early September. It's a sign of our progress that these re-deployments are largely invisible to the Iraqi public now that our troops have left their cities. Violence remains at record lows, and the Iraqi army and police are proving increasingly capable of taking responsibility for their own affairs.

Still, Iraq remains a volatile work in progress, and success or failure there will affect the entire Middle East. As the remaining American military forces come home by the end of 2011, our civilians will not only be responsible for resolving Iraq's many outstanding political and diplomatic issues. They will also take on responsibilities previously performed by our troops, including police training and providing security for diplomatic missions outside Baghdad.

In short, Mr. Ambassador, under your tenure, Washington will ask your diplomats to do more with less. And in return, Congress must give our civilians the resources they need to succeed. Having lost about 4,400 Americans and spent three-quarters of a trillion dollars in Iraq, now is not the moment to cut corners on the relatively modest resources our civilians are requesting to make a crucial and difficult transition.

There is, of course, a more immediate political challenge: four months after parliamentary elections, Iraq still does not have a new government. It's not clear whether a resolution is days, weeks, or months away. But it is clear that this political moment in Iraq demands that we put a new Ambassador in place quickly. This Committee will work to get you confirmed as soon as possible.

For their part, Iraqi politicians must finally put aside partisan and personal ambitions to attend to the needs of their people. The ongoing deadlock undercuts Iraqis' faith in their leaders and jeopardizes their shift away from sectarianism. It gives an opening to Al Qaeda and extremists hoping to undo our hard-won progress. And it distracts Iraqi political leaders from the crucial issues that will determine the nature of the Iraqi state and its relationship with America.

Forming a government is the beginning—not the end—of addressing Iraq’s problems. Core issues remain unresolved, from federalism to constitutional review to the disposition of Iraq’s oil wealth. But beneath all of these issues lies the same fundamental question: are Iraq’s political leaders committed to consolidating their democracy and resolve their differences peacefully?

Tensions between Iraqi Arabs and Kurds remain a serious threat to long-term stability. In the past year, we have established joint patrols along the disputed “trigger line” where Baghdad’s control ends and the Kurdish Peshmerga’s presence begins. Kurdish and Arab politicians in Mosul who couldn’t be coaxed into the same room are now involved in serious discussions. These are significant developments. But they are far short of the sustainable agreements needed to ensure stability along this volatile fault line after our troops are gone.

In the coming years, Iraq’s growing oil revenue can help meet glaring infrastructure and development needs and propel its economy into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. But the struggles of other oil-producing nations provide a clear warning of the corruption, economic dislocation and ethno-sectarian competition it can bring. We will continue to partner with Iraqis seeking to build the strong, durable institutions that can hold their country together.

It’s become an ongoing refrain that the next six months in Iraq are crucial. It turns out that every six month period is crucial. Under your watch, the template for the future of Iraqi – American relations will be set. From student and professional exchanges to military cooperation and sales, this partnership has the potential to be a bulwark for stability in the Middle East. But Iraqi leaders must decide what kind of country they hope to create. And as they do, we need to devote the diplomatic energy and civilian resources necessary to help them succeed.

Like Ambassador Jeffrey, the three nominees on our second panel— Ambassador Frank Ricciardone for Turkey, Maura Connelly for Lebanon and Gerald Feierstein for Yemen— represent the best that the State Department has to offer. In the interest of time, I won’t detail your decades of diplomatic experience and achievements. But I will note that, just like Ambassador Jeffrey, Ambassador Ricciardone had the good sense to be born and educated in Massachusetts. It’s a pleasure to welcome all of you here today.

Turkey is an important ally with strong governing institutions, a dynamic economy, and a vibrant civil society in a region where such assets are rare. Today, Turkey is making important contributions in Iraq and in Afghanistan as a member of NATO, and we are grateful for their support.

We’re all aware that Turkey has recently begun asserting its interests in the Middle East, and it will be a positive development if Turkey emerges as a more moderate alternative to Iranian influence in the region. Of course, we are troubled by the deterioration of Turkey’s relations with Israel. It’s in all of our interest that these two crucial American partners resolve the current impasse. And while the United States and Turkey will have our differences, this is an important relationship and we need to find a productive path forward together.

Lebanon, too, is a country in the midst of profound change. In the past five years alone, Lebanon has seen the assassination of its most important politician in a generation, the end of Syrian military occupation, a war on its own territory between Israel and Hezbollah, a four-month long battle between the Lebanese army and Palestinian extremists, and Hezbollah’s temporary takeover of downtown Beirut.

While the last year has been relatively quiet, the underlying issues which gave rise to all of these crises remain with us: most disconcertingly, Syrian and Iranian support for Hezbollah, Hezbollah’s military superiority, and the threat that poses to Israel and to Lebanon itself.

Some have questioned our continued support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, concerned that the weapons we provide will eventually wind up in Hezbollah’s hands. The truth is that our

Lebanese allies need to see they have a long-term partner in us, not a fair-weather friend. Building up the Lebanese military is not a magic bullet. But as an institution that enjoys the support of all of Lebanon's sectarian groups, a stronger Lebanese Armed Forces can be an important step toward reestablishing the primacy of the central government.

No amount of military aid, however, will change the fact that Lebanon is a small country in a dangerous region. And nothing will help to stabilize Lebanon more than active regional diplomacy. In that spirit, I urge my colleagues to confirm a fifth Ambassador alongside the four here today: Robert Ford's nomination to serve as Ambassador to Syria has languished since February, and it's time to send him to deliver difficult messages in Damascus.

Finally, we come to Yemen. Our longtime concern about the terrorist threat emanating from that country took on new urgency when it emerged that the would-be Christmas Day bomber was sent by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen-based preacher Anwar al-Awlaki appears to be the common thread in several recent attempted terror attacks on the United States.

Yemen's security, economic and humanitarian concerns also contribute to the problem. As Yemen runs out of water and oil and its population grows, each of these challenges threatens to exacerbate the conflicts within Yemen, from extremism to the inchoate southern secessionist movement to the threat of new fighting in the North.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has already demonstrated its dangerous reach. Addressing these imminent threats should and will remain our top priority. But—even as we pursue an aggressive counterterrorism strategy-- we have to recognize the limits of our ability to influence events in this complex, conservative, tribal society. For our efforts to be successful, they must be well coordinated with other international donors and Yemen's neighbors, and we must be clear about what we hope to achieve.

Ambassador Ricciardone, Ms Connelly, and Mr. Feierstein: All three of you are taking on difficult but crucial assignments. I'm not sure I can remember a panel of nominees who each faced such a full plate. I look forward to hearing from each of you today, and I'm hopeful that we can confirm all of today's nominees in the weeks ahead.

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