

Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing Titled “Afghanistan: What is an acceptable end-state, and how do we get there?”

Washington, D.C. – This morning, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a hearing to discuss the end-state in Afghanistan, how the death of Osama bin Laden affects the conflict and its implications for our upcoming troop withdrawal, our transition strategy, and our partnerships in the region.

The full text of Chairman Kerry’s statement as prepared is below:

Thank you all for coming. This is a seminal moment as we deliberate about our foreign policy and security interests. The death of Osama bin Laden is an event of enormous consequence. His wealth, his iconic stature gained by multiple murders and terrorist acts going back to 1993, his ability to plot, organize, direct and motivate terrorists, all of this made him a unique threat to our country and our allies.

Bin Laden’s death deals an enormous blow to Al Qaeda’s ability to operate. It doesn’t end the threat, but this is a major victory in the long campaign against terrorism waged by our intelligence agencies and our military. It enhances America’s security and it brings us closer to our objective of dismantling and destroying Al Qaeda.

Tragically, nothing can erase the bitter memories of September 11, 2001. The haunting images will be forever seared into our minds: the twin towers burning, people jumping hand in hand to escape the inferno, the buildings collapsing, floor by floor, upon themselves in a cloud of dust and destruction. But we remember, too, the heroism of America’s finest – the police, the firefighters, the emergency workers who gave their lives. These images and the realities that they meant for nearly 3,000 families and millions of people around the world will never be forgotten. For anyone who has challenged America’s right to go after Osama Bin Laden – and there are some – let them remember and consider the shameless, cowardly attack out of nowhere that Bin Laden unleashed on the innocence of all those who suffered – and that he then laughed and bragged about.

It is hard to believe that one man’s evil aspirations could so convulse the world, so occupy our resources and transform our lives. But he did. And now, thank God, he is dead.

Osama bin Laden’s death needs to be a lesson to all who embrace violence and anarchy in the guise of religious rectitude. The United States of America means what it says when we pledge to do whatever it takes to protect ourselves and mete out justice to those who wantonly murder and main.

Bin Laden is dead, but the fight against the violence and hatred he fomented is not over. One of the reasons we are here this morning is to examine how his death affects the conflict in Afghanistan and its implications for our upcoming troop withdrawal, our transition strategy and our partnerships in the region.

This hearing is the first in a series of six hearings over the next three weeks. It builds on the 14 hearings we held in the last Congress on Afghanistan and Pakistan. And we are fortunate to start with a strong panel of witnesses.

Dr. Richard Haass is president of the Council of Foreign Relations and a friend of the Committee. He held many senior government positions, including working Director of Policy Planning and U.S. coordinator for policy toward the future of Afghanistan.

He is joined by one of his successors, Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter, who recently returned to Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School after serving as Secretary Clinton's Director of Policy Planning.

Rounding out this group is three-time Ambassador Ronald Neumann, who currently serves as the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy. Like his father in the late 1960s, Ambassador Neumann served as our envoy to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007 and he recently returned from a trip there.

Thank you all for you coming, and I look forward to a vigorous discussion.

In two months, President Obama will unveil his strategy for drawing down our forces so Afghans can assume greater responsibility for their country. Our military is making significant inroads clearing the south of insurgents. But we expect a significant Taliban counter-attack this spring to regain some of these areas. We also know insurgents are spreading into other areas of Afghanistan as we drive them from their bases in the south.

But the challenge is not only on the battlefield. Despite the tremendous skill and sacrifice of our troops, there is no purely military victory to be had in Afghanistan. What we face is a political resolution. What we need is a discussion with our partners about how this war ends, what an acceptable end-state looks like, and what steps we need to take to get there. We must determine to what extent we are willing to let the Taliban be a part of an acceptable end-state, and with what red lines.

Now, with the death of Bin Laden, some people will ask why we don't pack up and leave Afghanistan. We can't do that. But it is no longer enough to simply lay out our goals. We need to determine what type of Afghanistan we plan to leave in our wake so that we may actually achieve these objectives.

And how will peace be achieved? Our reintegration efforts have had limited impact so far. Reconciliation is more promising in the long run, but it will not be fast and it won't be a silver bullet – there may be no grand bargain to be had with Mullah Omar or groups like the Haqqani network.

Still, some Taliban appear willing to negotiate, so the United States must send a strong and consistent message that we support a political solution led by the Afghans. It will be difficult, as it was in Iraq, but Afghans themselves must make the hard choices to bring stability to their country.

As we debate the end-state, we must factor in what we can afford in light of our budget constraints. We will spend \$120 billion in Afghanistan this fiscal year and our decisions on resource allocations there affect our global posture elsewhere, as we see today in the Middle East.

We have to ask at every turn if our strategy in Afghanistan is sustainable. Our military and civilian strategies must support an Afghanistan that is viable as we transition and draw down our forces.

Finally, we have to consider the regional context, particularly Pakistan's role and what bin Laden's presence there says about our alliance. Sanctuaries in Pakistan continue to threaten the prospects for peace in Afghanistan. While we have been working closely with our Pakistani allies to address our common threats, ultimately, we must address Pakistani concerns about what the end-state in Afghanistan looks like. This will take patience and determination, but I am confident we can get there.

I want to again thank each of you for joining us at this important moment.

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