

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman John F. Kerry**  
**Opening Statement for Middle East Peace Hearing**  
**May 14, 2009**

## **Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing On Middle East Peace**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) released the following opening remarks at the hearing titled, “The Middle East: The Road to Peace”.

*Full text as prepared is below:*

It is my pleasure to welcome here today a leader who has been a great friend to America, and more personally, someone I’ve gotten to know even better these past few years, and whose friendship I value. Since ending his decade of service as Britain’s Prime Minister, Tony Blair has continued to lead on global challenges from development in Africa to interfaith tolerance to climate change. And, at a moment when many would have been content to rest on their laurels, Tony Blair left office and volunteered for another tough assignment. He is here today as the Middle East Quartet Representative to discuss the prospects for peace.

This will be a critical month for this Administration’s Mideast policymaking. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will all be visiting Washington, and we expect that, in the wake of those meetings, the Administration and the Quartet will be releasing more details about their plans for peacemaking. And in early June, President Obama will travel to Egypt to deliver his much anticipated speech about America’s relations with the region and the wider Muslim world.

We all understand that peace will not come to the Middle East quickly or easily. But I share Mr. Blair’s optimism that this moment presents an opportunity we cannot afford to miss. If we are to avoid perpetual conflict and radicalization, more missed opportunities and countless lives lost, we must pursue peace now and with urgency.

One particularly promising diplomatic opening is Saudi King Abdullah’s Arab Peace Initiative, which never got the focus it deserved when it was proposed in 2002. Every Arab country has now agreed to the basic formulation of land for peace, recognition of the state of Israel, and normalization of relations. The Arab Initiative must now grow into a dynamic, evolving Arab engagement with Israel and with the Palestinians.

The simple reality is the regional dynamics of the Middle East have shifted, and today most Arab governments are more concerned about Iran than they are about Israel. Our challenge is to translate these changed dynamics into a Regional Road Map that signs all of the key players to take a series of concrete interim series on the road to peace.

We know that among the reasons Camp David failed was a lack of buy-in from Arab states whose support would have given Israel the broader peace that it seeks and Palestinians the necessary cover to make difficult decisions. That is a shortfall we can now address by developing a Regional Roadmap that fleshes out the promise of the Arab Peace Initiative.

A key aspect of this will be empowering those Palestinians who are committed to peace. It’s not enough to talk about giving Israel a legitimate partner for peace – we have to work to support and empower that partner to deliver for its people, build capacity, and gain legitimacy.

We have seen real progress in increasing Palestinian capacity and economic development, and this is progress we must build on. In Jenin, thanks in part to Tony Blair’s efforts, we have seen the site of some of the worst

violence of the second intifada become a place where Palestinians police the streets and economic growth is a reality for many.

General Dayton's efforts to train Palestinian security forces have also been encouraging. During the invasion of Gaza, Palestinian Security Forces largely succeeded in maintaining calm in the West Bank amidst widespread expectations of civil unrest. But make no mistake, much work remains to be done.

In Gaza, where Tony Blair visited in March, we must ensure that we deliver desperately needed humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance without, obviously, empowering Hamas in the process. Having courted destruction, Hamas and Iran cannot be allowed to take credit for the rebuilding, just as Hezbollah did in the wake of the Lebanon war in 2006.

Of course, as Tony Blair has said, economic and humanitarian progress will not be enough. There is no substitute for political progress toward a two-state solution. That remains American policy, and I am confident that the President will be firm on this point when the region's leaders visit later this month. The President has picked an ideal envoy in Senator George Mitchell, who worked closely with then-Prime Minister Blair to achieve the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. So this is a team with a proven track record.

We will also need help from Israel. Nothing will do more to make clear our seriousness about turning the page than demonstrating – with actions rather than words – that we are serious about Israel freezing settlement activity in the West Bank. As recently as 2007 at the Annapolis conference, Israel recommitted to implementing its obligations under the Road Map, which include freezing all settlement activity. We will defend Israel's security unflinchingly. But the fact is, Israelis themselves decided that the settlements make it more difficult to protect the security of their citizens. They're not just fragmenting the Palestinian state – they fragment what the Israeli Defense Forces have to defend.

None of us can afford to continue on the present course. And nothing drove home for me the human toll of continued conflict more forcefully than a recent day I spent visiting the southern Israeli village of Sderot and then the Gazan town of Izbet Abed Rabo.

In Sderot, which has been the target of thousands of rockets over the last eight years, security officials told me that, from the moment they know a rocket has been fired from Gaza, people have just 15 seconds to find safety. Children in the second grade have spent literally every day of their lives never more than 15 seconds from danger.

In Izbet Abed Rabo in Gaza, I saw little Palestinian girls playing in rubble where, just months ago, buildings stood. I saw the ruins of the American School in Gaza. But I also saw a glimmer of hope in the faces of average Palestinians determined to carry on with their daily lives.

As I said in Gaza and I said it in Sderot, if terrorists in Quincy, Massachusetts, were launching rockets into Boston, we would have to put a stop to it, just as the Israelis were forced to respond. But on both sides, I was inspired by the determination of all who live with the daily reality of this conflict. If the kids on both sides can hope for themselves, if they can persevere for a better future, then we must help them get there. And we all know what it's going to take: two states living side by side in peace and security.

The question, of course, is how we get there, and I am eager to hear Mr. Blair's thoughts on the path forward.

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