

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for “Iraq: The Challenging Transition To A Civilian Mission”
February 1, 2011

Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing On Iraq

Washington, D.C. – This morning, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a hearing on the challenges the United States faces as we transition from a military mission to a civilian-led effort in Iraq. For the first time at a congressional hearing, Ambassador James Jeffery and Commanding General Lloyd Austin testified together.

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

Thank you all for coming.

Before we get started this morning, let me just say this. We are witnessing a historic moment in the Middle East. It is too early to know what lies ahead, but clearly these events will have a monumental influence on the region and American foreign policy for years to come. It’s a subject that this Committee will examine closely in the days and weeks ahead.

Today, we are gathered to discuss another critical issue in the Middle East: Iraq. I have referred to the Iraq War as our new forgotten war. While Afghanistan and Iran and now Egypt continue to demand our attention, Iraq’s importance to the long-term stability of the Middle East cannot be underestimated.

I’d like to welcome our witnesses, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey and General Lloyd Austin. They’re two of our nation’s most dedicated public servants. The caliber of their leadership is shown by the fact that our military in Baghdad praises Ambassador Jeffrey and that our diplomats in Baghdad are equally enthusiastic about General Austin. Their unity of effort is something the rest of us here in Washington would do well to emulate.

Significant progress has been made in Iraq during the last four years. More than 100,000 American troops have been withdrawn and the security situation, though sometimes strained, has not unraveled. Forming a government was a long and contentious process, but the political factions kept their commitment to negotiation over violence.

Despite this progress, we face difficult choices in 2011. In accordance with the 2008 bilateral agreements, signed and negotiated by the Bush administration, the U.S. military must leave the country by the end of the year. After our troops are gone, the diplomatic mission that remains will be of unprecedented size and complexity. Current planning calls for 17,000 people to be under chief of mission authority on roughly 15 different sites. Beyond our embassy in Baghdad, these sites will include three air hubs, three police training centers, two consulates, two embassy branch offices, and five Office of Security Cooperation sites.

Time is short. This civilian effort must be fully operational by October. This would be complicated enough if we had a complete inventory of all of the moving parts. But there are still important unanswered questions which we will try to address this morning:

- Does the State Department have the capacity to support an ambitious diplomatic mission without American military support?
- In a still dangerous security environment, what is the future of the U.S. - Iraqi relationship?
- And perhaps, most importantly, are we as a nation willing to commit the resources necessary to this civilian effort to ensure its success?

Today, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is releasing a majority staff report that examines these issues in detail. I believe it sheds important light on the tradeoffs involved. The report makes a number of recommendations, which I hope the administration will seriously consider.

With so much uncertainty, we've got to make sure the scope of the mission is balanced with the resources that are available. These include our civilian capacity, a financial commitment from Congress, a degree of U.S. military support and the backing of the Iraqi government.

If these elements are not in place, we may face a difficult choice between scaling back the diplomatic mission or accepting a degree of physical risk that's all too familiar for our military personnel, but normally unacceptable for our diplomats.

I think we can get the balance right. But it will require a "whole of government" approach. That means better integration between the Departments of State and Defense, and frankly a greater willingness from Congress to provide the financial resources necessary for success by supporting our diplomatic efforts with the same vigor that we devote to our military mission.

In the coming weeks, I will explore the possibility of a multi-year authorization package for Iraq that would include the operational costs of the mission, as well as our security and economic assistance programs. This package could serve as a roadmap to the American public so that our effort in Iraq might end better than it began.

Before turning to Senator Lugar, I want to thank those serving in harm's way in Iraq – uniformed and civilian alike – for your courage, your commitment and your service to this country. You are not forgotten, nor is our debt of gratitude to you.

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