

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
July 14, 2010

**Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing On “Afghanistan:
Governance and the Civilian Strategy”**

Washington, D.C. – This afternoon, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a hearing with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke on “Afghanistan: Governance and the Civilian Strategy.”

The full text of his statement as prepared is below:

I want to thank everyone for coming this afternoon. And I want to extend a special thanks to Ambassador Holbrooke, who has taken time from his busy schedule to appear again before the committee. As always, Dick, we look forward to hearing your insights on the current situation and on the prospects for the future in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This is the Foreign Relations Committee’s 11th hearing on Afghanistan in the past year and a half. The number reflects our commitment to understanding the challenges in Afghanistan and our recognition of the critical role this conflict plays in the region and in our own national security.

The number also reflects an unfortunate fact: Last month, Afghanistan surpassed Vietnam as the longest military campaign in American history. More than 1,000 men and women have lost their lives in Afghanistan. Nearly 6,000 have been injured, many of them grievously. We owe a duty to every one of them, to their families and to the tens of thousands of other military and civilian personnel in Afghanistan from this country and our partners to exercise our oversight role seriously and responsibly.

This is a difficult moment in the Afghan conflict. Our progress is decidedly mixed, particularly in the south where the Taliban are strongest. They are assassinating government officials and tribal leaders and intimidating Afghans who want to support coalition efforts.

Corruption appears to be growing. One in three Afghan households reports having to pay a bribe to obtain public services. And our civilian aid efforts to bring stability and consolidate military gains are off to a slow start in the south and east.

Many people are asking whether we have the right strategy. Some suggest this is a lost cause. But grim as the statistics are, heartbreaking as every death is, this is not the time to give up.

This is the time to ask hard questions about the progress we are making toward our objectives of defeating Al Qaeda and bringing a measure of stability to Afghanistan. This is the time to demand accountability from our partners on the battlefield and in the corridors of government from Washington to Brussels, from Kabul to Kandahar.

And it’s time asses how our strategy fits the realities on the ground. Over the past year, some of those realities have changed, very few for the better. I believe the three conditions I laid out last October for deploying more troops still hold today, and I have doubts about whether they are being met.

First, we should insist on the presence of reliable Afghan troops to partner with our military before we clear an area. Second, in order to hold an area, we should require capable local leaders with whom we can partner to provide effective governance. And finally, to build and transfer an area to Afghan control, the civilian side must be prepared to move in quickly with well-implemented development aid.

Let me be clear: When these conditions are not met, it is difficult to imagine a good outcome.

Today's hearing is intended to take a tough look at our civilian strategy to see if we are on the right path. The administration requested \$4.4 billion in fiscal year 2010 to support civilian efforts in Afghanistan, and another \$3.9 billion for next fiscal year.

We need to be smart in how we spend this money. In recent weeks, the committee staff conducted 16 briefings with the State Department and USAID to examine how we are spending the taxpayers' money – dollar by dollar, sector by sector in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We will continue to keep a close eye on how our money is being used to promote stability in this region.

But all of these billions of dollars, and all of the sacrifices by our troops, will be irrelevant if the United States and our partners do not have a serious strategy to establish effective Afghan governance. The problem is that the key element of this strategy is the one over which we have the least control, and that is the willingness and the ability of Afghans to assume ownership of this effort.

For nearly nine years, most Afghans have seen themselves as bystanders in a conflict between the West and Al Qaeda being fought in their homeland. In recent months, we have launched a concerted effort to convince Afghans that this is their fight. This is not easy, given their historic distrust of foreigners on Afghan soil, but it is vital.

Ultimately, we need a better understanding of what success means in Afghanistan and what an acceptable state looks like there. I have said repeatedly that there is no purely military solution in Afghanistan. But we need to understand what a political solution looks like and how we get there.

These are some of the questions that we will be posing to Ambassador Holbrooke today.

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