

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman John F. Kerry**  
**July 27, 2010**

## **Chairman Kerry Opening Statement As Delivered At Hearing On “Perspectives on Reconciliation Options in Afghanistan”**

**Washington, D.C.** – This morning, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a hearing on Afghanistan. This is the Committee’s twelfth oversight hearing on U.S. policy toward Afghanistan in the past year and a half.

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

I would like to make a few opening comments and then we’ll proceed with each of the other witnesses. Let me begin by thanking you for coming today to talk to the Committee. I think you can see from the membership today that this is obviously an important issue to the country and to the Congress. There are a lot of questions, which is entirely appropriate. Today’s hearing is really to try and focus on the issue of reconciliation and see what role that might play in achieving a political solution in the end. And I think we have a very thoughtful panel to consider those issues.

I might just comment that this is the 12th hearing of the Committee on Afghanistan in the past eighteen months. And it reflects our recognition of the critical role this issue plays, the unbelievable expense of human treasure of our sons and daughters, and the monetary cost, which is also enormous.

I want to say a couple of words about the leaked documents on Afghanistan and Pakistan yesterday. I think it is important to not overhype or get excessively excited about the meaning of those documents. Certainly to those of us that lived through the Pentagon papers and a different period, there is no relationship whatsoever to that event or to those documents. In fact, these documents in many cases reflect a very different pattern of involvement by the U.S. government from that period of time.

For all of us, the release of any classified information—I think this needs to be stated—is unacceptable. It breaks the law. And equally important, it compromises the efforts of our troops in the field and has the potential of putting people in harm’s way.

These documents appear to be primarily raw intelligence reports from the field. And as such, anybody who has dealt with these reports knows that some are completely dismissible, some of them are completely unreliable, and some of them are very reliable. But raw intelligence needs to be processed properly, generally by people who have a context in which to put it. And so I think people need to be very careful in evaluating what they do read there.

I also want to emphasize that the events covered in these documents occurred before last December, when the President announced a new Afghanistan strategy clearly designed to address some of the very issues that are raised by these documents. Obviously in many cases, many of us have raised the issues in these documents with the Pakistanis and with the Afghans. And I’ll say a word more about that in a moment.

All of us, however, are concerned that after nearly nine years of war, more than 1,000 American casualties, and billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars, the Taliban appear to be as strong as they have been. And to successfully reverse that trend, it is going to be very important for us to depend on our partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

These allegations about ties between extremists and Pakistan’s intelligence agency are not new allegations. It is important for everybody to understand that. We have been wrestling with these allegations and we have made some progress. General Kayani, General Pasha, and others have been over here. We have had a number of meetings. We’ve been over there. This is not a sort of revelation of a topic. This is something we have been

dealing with, and many people believe we are making some progress, particularly when measured against the offensives the Pakistanis themselves have taken in Swat and in South Waziristan, with great political difficulty and with great risk to themselves.

Now, I've joined many top Administration officials in raising these very concerns with the Pakistani leaders, and in making the point again and again that the battle against extremists is in the interests of Pakistan as well as the United States. And I think that when those extremists crossed over the Indus River last year, the threat became clear to the rest of Islamabad and Pakistan. I think the Pakistani people have now recognized the threat posed by homegrown extremists, and their government and military have responded.

We're here this morning to discuss a key aspect of how we stay together with our allies and move forward in the most effective way.

The question before the Committee and before our country is, what role does reconciliation play in reaching a political solution that allows our troops to leave Afghanistan consistent with our core national security interests?

It is inescapable that if Afghanistan were simply to tumble into anarchy or to fall as an existing government, and the Taliban would return, there's no question in any quarter of our intelligence or national security community that the consequence of that would be to give a free rein and even some exaltation to Al Qaeda. It would certainly provide a greater ability for them to be able to organize.

The question for us is: What would it take to prevent that from happening? Does it require the full measure of what we are doing today or something different? I think this is the most important question for us to examine. As we do, I'm convinced personally that Pakistan remains as central as we have said it is over the course of the last months, and perhaps holds the key even to resolving this because it will not be resolved on the battlefield.

So we have to figure out, which insurgent groups can be a part of the reconciliation process? What are the appropriate conditions and how would they be enforced? Is the time right for approaching this? Who should be in charge of negotiations: the Karzai government? The United States? The United Nations? And what is the role of Pakistan in that reconciliation process?

None of these are easy questions to answer, but I assure you, and I think the panel agrees, that they are critical to any outcome.

In the past, the United States has supported "reintegration" efforts in Afghanistan aimed at winning over low-level insurgency commanders and fighters. We have not yet supported the broader concept of reconciliation, which would involve talks with the leaders of the insurgency.

There are those who say this is not the time to talk. Some argue that we have to weaken the Taliban militarily so they come to the bargaining table willing to cut a deal. Others contend that we should start reconciliation negotiations now, while we still have time to exert military pressure.

This is the first Congressional hearing that I know of that is dedicated to this issue of reconciliation. It comes at a timely moment. Last week, representatives from 65 countries gathered in Kabul for a conference to debate security, development and reconciliation. This conference was a good step forward in showing the world that Afghanistan wants to run its own affairs. But many steps need to be taken by the Afghan government and international coalition to make this a reality.

During the Kabul conference, President Karzai repeated his commitment that any dialogue with insurgents is contingent on their willingness to accept the Afghan constitution and renounce Al Qaeda. Secretary of State Clinton went further, stressing that any peace deal with the Taliban cannot come at the expense of women and civil society.

Reconciliation must also address the anxieties of Afghanistan's minorities – the Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks – who fear being left out of a Pashtun-only deal. And Pashtuns too must feel included in the process. Any

reconciliation agreement is going to have to be genuinely national, not the precursor to another civil war. You can see the complexity. This is a major diplomatic negotiating lift.

And any talks have to also take into account the interests of the regional players –Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, Russia and perhaps most importantly, Pakistan and India. Any successful political solution is going to have to take into account the power struggles that are under way in the region and the very real concerns of Afghanistan’s neighbors.

There has to be a recognition that there are actors other than the Quetta Shura Taliban that have to be considered in that process. And chief among them are the insurgent groups led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, both of which are continuing to target U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

So today to help us search for these answers we have Ambassador Ryan Crocker who is familiar with both Afghanistan and the challenges of quelling an insurgency through diplomacy. He was the first U.S. charge in Kabul after September 11 and ambassador to Pakistan. He was the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad when the tide turned in favor of stability there. So we welcome you back, Ambassador.

David Kilcullen is a former Australian army officer and an expert in counterinsurgency who helped engineer the Sons of Awakening in Iraq when he was on the civilian staff of General David Petraeus. He is also familiar with the challenges that General Petraeus and our civilian leaders face in Afghanistan today.

And Zainab Salbi is the founder and CEO of Women for Women International, a grassroots humanitarian and development organization. She has been a leading voice on civilian security in Afghanistan.

I will make a final comment before we get back to our panel. I really believe that, in the amount of space we are trying to operate in Afghanistan and the numbers of troops we have allied together, there are just some inherent limits that the Taliban have come to understand better perhaps than others. Clearly, we have to operate within this political reality. I can’t say it enough times: I believe that Pakistan is more crucial to the outcome than what happens in Afghanistan itself in many cases. And I think that remains true today.

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