

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman John F. Kerry**  
**Opening Statement for A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan**  
**May 21, 2009**

**Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing On Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) released the following opening remarks at the hearing titled, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

*Full text as prepared is below:*

Thank you for joining us today, Admiral. We all value your insights enormously, and we are grateful for your service.

It’s been just two months since President Obama announced his new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The situation in both countries remains enormously challenging.

In Afghanistan, the trend lines over the past two years have been disturbing to all of us. Casualty rates are rising for American troops, for our coalition partners, for Afghan security forces—and especially for Afghan civilians.

Security throughout most of the country is as bad as it has been at any time since the ouster of the Taliban. The Afghan people have little affection for the Taliban—and yet support is rapidly falling for America, for the international community, and for the Kabul government.

Regardless of the result, August’s Afghan elections will be a milestone for the country. If the elections are successful, they can offer a much-needed break with recent disappointments. But if the polling is marred by intimidation, fraud and other forms of abuse, it could push Afghanistan back toward the succession of failed, illegitimate governments of the past.

The reality is, with this new strategy, we know from our commanders on the ground that things might get worse before they get better. Deploying an additional 17,700 troops to Afghanistan is necessary to reverse the tide and prevent the Taliban insurgency from gaining unstoppable momentum. When I visited our troops in Kandahar and Qalat this winter, I heard repeatedly that our soldiers understand the tough road ahead. The American people must be prepared for it, too.

The Obama Administration recognizes the challenge, which is why they have set forth a clear and limited goal of not allowing Afghanistan to again become a safe haven for Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups that seek to attack us.

Under the leadership of General Petraeus, we are implementing a classic counterinsurgency strategy that will focus on protecting the civilian population rather than focusing on the enemy’s body count; treating the populace, rather than geography, as the “terrain” to be won over; training Afghan security forces; understanding the local culture and tradition, so that we can forge genuine partnerships; and empowering the populace itself to make this struggle their own. And I am confident that the Administration and the military understand that, if we are to win over the Afghan people, we must redouble our efforts to reduce civilian casualties.

We must also devise a more sophisticated counternarcotics strategy. Unless we provide alternate livelihoods to farmers while cracking down on drug kingpins and processing labs, we’re unlikely to break the stranglehold of corrupt government officials and narco-traffickers.

In Pakistan, the challenges are in many ways greater, and certainly our ability to confront them is far more limited. But make no mistake: Pakistan is an absolutely vital and compelling national security concern. I don't need to tell you that if a nuclear-armed nation of 170 million people were to become a failed state, it would pose an unimaginable peril to itself, its neighbors, and the world.

At our hearing with Ambassador Holbrooke last week, we discussed Pakistan in depth. But I would like to emphasize a few points.

First, to fix a Pakistan policy that has largely failed, we need to create a bold new strategy. Sen. Lugar and I have introduced legislation which we believe helps to do just that. By tripling non-military aid, authorizing it for 5-10 years, and de-linking this aid from our security assistance, we can put our relationship with Pakistan on an entirely new foundation. We can ground our ties on the bedrock of the Pakistani people. That's why President Obama explicitly called on Congress to pass the Kerry-Lugar bill as part of his overall strategy.

Second, I was struck during my recent visit to the Frontier Corps Headquarters in Peshawar to hear that, after the Corps had fought so hard to clear the Taliban out of Bajaur and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, they had no capacity to bring in the type of development assistance necessary to consolidate their military gains. The bill that Sen. Lugar and I propose will help provide the "hold" and the "build" parts of Pakistan's counterinsurgency strategy. If we can employ this capability not only in the tribal areas, but throughout the country before settled areas like Punjab and Sindh are destabilized, then we may also be able to address an emerging crisis before it materializes.

Third, the current humanitarian crisis in Swat valley is a pressing immediate need. It is also an opportunity. I welcome the Administration's decision to send \$110 million in humanitarian aid: As I noted at last week's hearing, we have a chance here to demonstrate America's friendship for the Pakistani people. After the Kashmir earthquake, the sight of American servicemen and servicewomen saving the lives of Pakistanis was incontrovertible proof of our good intentions—and for a time Pakistanis trusted Americans more than their own government or religious radicals. We failed to follow up on that effort—but the bill proposed by Sen. Lugar and me aims to correct this failure.

Finally, let us be clear about what is possible. Ultimately, we can influence events in Pakistan, but we cannot decide them. We can strengthen the hand of the moderate majority, but the choices will be made by the Pakistanis themselves.

Chairman Mullen, I look forward to your military assessment of this new plan, and to your thoughts on our legislation. Thank you for coming today.

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