

**U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman John F. Kerry**  
**Opening Statement For Hearing On NATO**  
**October 22, 2009**

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) delivered the following opening statement at the hearing titled "NATO: A Strategic Concept for Transatlantic Security":

Today we will discuss the future of our NATO alliance. Earlier this week in Afghanistan, I saw firsthand NATO's single largest present-day commitment. And let me tell you, whatever our differences, our allies have made enormous sacrifices in Afghanistan. They, too, are serving heroically.

While questions remain on both sides of the Atlantic about the future of our Afghan mission, our confidence in the idea and the cohesion of NATO remains strong. Our commitment to defend our NATO allies is unwavering.

NATO turned sixty this year. As we all know, there have been times when NATO's critics called it an alliance in search of a mission. Today, as new challenges multiply and old ones resurface, it has become clear that as long as NATO continues to adapt, it will remain essential going forward.

The Strategic Concept review is an important vehicle for NATO to evolve—recalibrating its priorities, re-inventing itself and preparing to protect the West from challenges new and old. That is why, even as we grapple with Afghanistan and other present concerns, it remains the right time for a public dialogue about NATO's future.

In a recent speech at the Atlantic Council, Senator Lugar was once again ahead of the curve in emphasizing the need for the alliance to incorporate emerging threats such as terrorism and drug trafficking. I agree. We don't choose threats to our security, they choose us. If the alliance is serious about the security of its members, then it must focus on the real threats.

Of course, while the world has changed, we are still dealing with some of the same geostrategic and ideological concerns that brought NATO into being: in particular, a deep and durable commitment by like-minded democracies to cooperate closely and deter aggression with a promise to rise up in defense of any NATO member under attack.

This guarantee has helped keep the peace. NATO has a proven record as a positive transformative force in Eastern and Central Europe, where an aspiration to NATO membership helped bring about democratic reforms and stability. I hope we can also use this hearing to address the prospects for future NATO enlargement to include Balkan nations, Georgia, and Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen has made the establishment of strong relations with Russia a priority. If we are to consider President Medvedev's proposal for changes to Europe's security architecture we should realistically build on the foundations we already have, such as the OSCE. The potential for constructive relations is great, but it will take an investment of trust and confidence to break the habits of the past.

Finally, the impending passage of the Lisbon Treaty, which consolidates power within the EU, makes it all the more important that we get the NATO-EU relationship right. As the EU grows in importance, we need to find a way for these two organizations to collaborate effectively. This is an opportunity to help bring about the stronger European partner we have always sought—one more willing to share the burden of defending our ideals.

###