

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement at Hearing on NATO
May 20, 2010

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing titled, “NATO: Report of the Group of Experts”.

The full text of his statement as prepared is below:

We are fortunate to be joined today by one of America’s leading diplomats. As we begin this hearing, I’m reminded that when Madeleine Albright was asked who had been her toughest negotiating partner over all her years as UN Ambassador and Secretary of State, she didn’t miss a beat. “That’s easy,” she said. “Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms.” So we appreciate your willingness to come back and testify before this Committee today.

Last year, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen asked Secretary Albright to chair an expert group responsible for guiding NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept. Today she is here to offer her findings as part of our ongoing discussion on NATO’s future. Welcome back, Madam Secretary.

Like many of the international institutions that defined the second half of the twentieth century, NATO must struggle to keep up with the changes of the twenty-first. In many ways, the question all of us continue to wrestle with is the same one that confronted the Clinton Administration: How can the alliance evolve to meet new threats?

A strong alliance of likeminded democracies grounded in mutual defense is a major strategic asset in confronting global problems. NATO’s 28 member states hold about 840 million people who collectively account for nearly half the world’s GDP.

But, unless we actively shape the institution to match new challenges, we cannot take for granted that NATO will continue to perform the role it was created for: the protection of its member states. Our definition of security is expanding to include new challenges such as international terrorist networks, cyber crime, energy security, and the security consequences of climate change. These are just a few of the many issues on which member countries are seeking greater cooperation. Each deserves further exploration from NATO.

In Afghanistan, the alliance has also taken on its first mission outside Europe. While we mourn the death of the 1,000th American serving in Afghanistan this week, we should recognize that our NATO allies, too, are serving heroically.

As we contemplate future NATO missions, we need to learn the political and military lessons of Afghanistan: that a modern military mission needs to be fully integrated with a civilian effort; and while security within NATO will sometimes mean acting beyond its boundaries, these missions must be framed in ways that maintain support from the citizens of member countries.

Reinventing NATO also means building stronger, more stable relations with our former enemy, Russia. It is encouraging that both the US and NATO have made significant progress, and I’m optimistic that we can deepen these habits of cooperation by signing the New START treaty.

At the same time, we must carefully balance our improved relations with Russia with the strategic reassurance that our Eastern NATO allies depend on and deserve.

We also need to address a series of practical challenges that have become apparent since the last strategic concept was drafted in 1999. First, it's clear that the European Union's foreign policy responsibilities have multiplied and the two organizations need to find a way around the existing impasse to improve cooperation. Second, the alliance needs to improve its decision-making ability while preserving the principle of consensus. Third, members of the alliance should continue to pool resources under joint commands and eliminate those commands that are no longer critical. And fourth, the alliance must do more to protect its own infrastructure and critical systems against cyber attacks—and consider how the alliance will respond to this new and dangerous threat.

Finally, we need to address the difficult question of tactical nuclear weapons. NATO's agreement to discuss this question as an alliance is a good one. We shouldn't be negotiating piecemeal what is at its core a question of collective security for Europe. There's a great deal of interest in these questions on this Committee and I look forward to hearing your thoughts today.

These are not easy questions. The dangers present at the creation of NATO have largely been supplanted by a new set of urgent concerns. NATO is a living alliance. Its continued credibility depends on its ability to evolve alongside our challenges.

As Secretary of State during the second half of the Clinton Administration, Madeleine Albright already presided over two pivotal moments in NATO's history—NATO's decision to use military force to end the genocide in Kosovo and the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into the alliance.

Secretary Albright has already played a profound role in shaping NATO's present. Now she has been asked by NATO to help shape its future. Last October Secretary Albright appeared before the Committee to discuss her ongoing work. Now, she and a group of distinguished experts from allied countries have released the finished product: "NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement." We look forward to hearing her findings.

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