

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement For Hearing On The New Afghanistan Strategy: The View From The Ground
December 9, 2009

Chairman Kerry: “Pakistan Is The Core Of Our Challenge”

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) delivered the following opening statement at the hearing titled “The New Afghanistan Strategy: The View From The Ground”:

Full text as prepared is below:

General David Petraeus, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Under Secretary Jack Lew—we welcome you here today.

Eight days ago, the President announced a new phase in our Afghan mission, including a decision to send an additional 30,000 troops. For all the answers the President offered, a great many questions remain about crucial dimensions of our plan: the details of our civilian strategy, how Afghan governance at all levels will improve, and above all, how we will strengthen our partnership with Pakistan.

As I have said, I believe that three principal conditions ought to narrow and guide the deployment and tasking of our additional troops: First, are their enough reliable Afghan forces to partner with? Second, are there local Afghan leaders to work with on the ground? And third, is the civilian capacity in place to make our military gains sustainable?

I was pleased to hear General McChrystal say yesterday that as we plan new operations, we will take great care to ensure that the civilian and development elements are in place to immediately follow our troops. Ultimately, our success depends on having a robust civilian effort to build on our military gains. Jack Lew, the State Department official responsible for resourcing our civilian strategy, is here today to address this issue directly.

Importantly, each of the challenges I have mentioned demand not only that America improve on our past performance, but also that our partners improve on theirs.

This challenge is especially crucial when it comes to Pakistan. I am convinced that what happens in Pakistan, particularly near the Afghan border, will do more to determine the outcome in Afghanistan than any increase in troops or shift in strategy. Pakistan is, in many ways, the core of our challenge.

From the Haqqani network to the Quetta Shura, the interconnected extremist groups we face do not stop at the Afghan border—and so our strategy must also extend to Pakistan. Al Qaeda’s leaders are there, most likely including Osama Bin Laden, homegrown militants like Lashkar-e-Taiba are there, and so are the men directing the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Pakistan is a sovereign nation, and we need to convince its government to tackle *all* of the extremist groups threatening regional and international security—for Pakistan’s sake, as well as ours.

The Pakistani military has demonstrated firm resolve with its offensive against the Pakistani Taliban in the Malakand Division of the Northwest Frontier Province and South Waziristan, and its commanders and soldiers deserve great credit. Now, we are looking to Pakistan to also take on the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and al-Qaeda strongholds. This will be crucial to our success in Afghanistan.

Today, we are prepared to provide Pakistan with additional equipment and other military assistance to help its people and government prevail against these extremists. But we have to know that we are building a new and lasting partnership.

Many Pakistanis believe that America will once again abandon the region as we did after the fall of the Soviet Union—one reason why Pakistan has often hedged its bets and used the Taliban for strategic depth. Let me be clear: It would be a mistake for anyone in Pakistan or elsewhere to believe that the President's words about drawing down troops from Afghanistan mean an end to our involvement in the region. Our challenge today is to persuade Pakistan that it cannot and doesn't need to hedge its bets. Our troop deployments will eventually decrease, but America is committed to the people of the region for the long haul, as our \$7.5 billion civilian aid bill demonstrates.

It also reflects our recognition that Pakistan's civilian, military, and intelligence leaders face serious challenges. All of us are engaged in a difficult balancing act between the tougher measures we believe must be taken and the anti-American blowback that such measures can bring to Pakistan's fragile democratic institutions.

It should help our efforts that no country has suffered more than Pakistan at the hands of al Qaeda, the Taliban, and affiliated terrorist groups. Some 2,600 people have been killed in terrorist attacks in Pakistan in the last two and a half years.

And yet, when so many Pakistanis view the United States as an enemy, we have to admit that we have not always fought for our reputation enough. We must do more to make the case that, fundamentally, America and Pakistan are fighting for the same things. We need to make clear to the people of Pakistan that we will be full partners in their fight against extremist elements, which is why in 2009 alone, the United States has given about \$300 million for conflict-affected populations in Pakistan.

All nations are threatened by extremism, whether it takes place in New York City or Mumbai or in Peshawar. We must work together in stopping people throwing bombs and killing innocent people. That's the world's challenge, and it means that Afghanistan, Pakistan and India must cooperate to reduce the violence and eliminate the tensions.

Our troops are defending the right of Afghanistan to develop its own government. They are risking their lives to chase down international criminals who threaten not just the United States but Afghanistan, Pakistan and beyond. There will come an inevitable moment in this fight where our partners in Pakistan must take up the fight with an equal vigor so that we do not have to take matters into our own hands.

I believe we can build a significantly stronger relationship with Pakistan. And I also believe that, in the long run, Pakistan will strengthen its own democracy, institutions, and security by engaging in a comprehensive and unfettered fight against the extremists within its own borders.

Here in Washington, our domestic debate has focused a great deal of energy on the question of how many troops we will send to Afghanistan. I believe that other strategic questions—civilian capacity, improved governance, standing up Afghan security forces and especially greater partnership with Pakistan—will all be crucial determinants of success.

As CENTCOM Commander, Ambassador to Afghanistan, and the State Department official responsible for management and resources, the members of this panel are well-equipped to delve into the details of these vital efforts. I look forward to your testimony.

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