

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for Foreign Affairs Budget Hearing
March 2, 2011

Washington, D.C. –Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a hearing this morning on national security and the foreign policy priorities in President Obama’s 2012 international affairs budget.

Full text of Chairman Kerry’s statement as prepared:

Madame Secretary, it is a pleasure to see you again, and I cannot think of a more relevant moment for you to appear before this Committee.

We have joined with allies in making clear that Col. Qadhafi must go. He has lost all legitimacy. We cannot be half way about that goal. The people of Libya do not ask for or need foreign troops on the ground. They are committed to doing what is necessary, but they do need the tools to prevent the slaughter of innocents on Libyan Streets and, I believe the global community cannot be on the sidelines while airplanes are allowed to bomb and strafe. A no fly-zone is not a long-term proposition and we should be ready to implement it as necessary.

It is clear we are living through one of the most important transformations in the history of the modern world. Some have likened the wave of protests sweeping the Middle East to the revolutions of 1848, which changed Europe’s political landscape forever. And there is no doubt that the events of this year will be studied in the decades to come.

But, in this moment, we do not yet know the full ramifications of the upheaval that has sped from Tunis to Tahrir Square, to the streets of Manama and Sana and Tripoli and beyond. What we do know is that this is a time of great challenge—and great opportunity—both for the people of the region and for America’s relationship with them.

Events this powerful demand a response of equal power. Our commitment now to the ordinary people who are risking their lives to win human rights and democracy will be remembered for generations in the Arab world. We have to get this moment right. We are working here in the Senate with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to create a package of financial assistance to help turn the new Arab awakening into a lasting rebirth.

This is not about sending troops and tanks to remake a region in our image. It is about sending economists and election experts and humanitarian aid to help a region remake itself. We have not worked out the numbers or the details yet, but I am convinced a significant financial commitment by the US to assist in this monumental and uplifting transformation is key to its long-term outcome and our relationship to it.

We are being called upon to forge new relationships in a part of the world that has been and will remain vital to our national security. And we have been given the opportunity to demonstrate conclusively to the young men and women of the Muslim world and beyond that al Qaeda’s belief that change requires violence and radicalization is wrong.

One thing stands out in the events of the past month: The Arab awakening is an unambiguous repudiation of al Qaeda’s poisonous doctrine. We now have one of history’s greatest opportunities to affirm the universal appeal of democratic values to people across cultures and religions and to encourage an entire region toward reform and away from violence.

I understand that we face a budget crisis in our own country. But we can either pay now to help brave people build a better, democratic future for themselves or we will certainly pay later with increased threats to our own national security.

The budget that we are here to discuss this morning lays the foundation for our ability to fulfill our responsibilities. The \$53 billion in core funding that the President has requested for international affairs is a small investment for such a great return. Consider that this year we will spend approximately \$700 billion on our military. By contrast, the international affairs budget is less than one-tenth of what the Pentagon spends. As Secretary Gates once pointed out, if you took the entire Foreign Service roster, you could barely staff one aircraft carrier.

And yet our diplomats are serving on the frontlines of multiple revolutions and wars. They are making vital contributions in Afghanistan, and in Iraq they are planning the transition from a military mission to a diplomatic one so that we can cement the political progress that has cost hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands of American lives.

In Africa, they are helping to midwife the birth of a new nation in South Sudan, to resolve the situation in Darfur, and to forge a new relationship with the government in Khartoum. They are leading the fight against global challenges, like nuclear proliferation and climate change. And in countless communities around the world they are providing essential humanitarian assistance—preventing the spread of cholera in Haiti, distributing food to refugees from conflict in northern Kenya, and providing shelter to flood victims in Pakistan.

This is not time for America to pull back from the world. This is time to step forward.

Yet, just last week, the House sent us a Continuing Resolution for fiscal year 2011 that imposes draconian cuts.

This budget would slash our humanitarian aid by 50 percent, decimating our ability to provide food, shelter, and medicine after natural disasters and putting hundreds of thousands of lives at risk.

It would cut nearly two-thirds of the funds devoted to promoting clean energy and increasing resilience to climate change in the most vulnerable regions of the world. It would cut over \$1 billion in global health funding, which means that over 400,000 people who would have received life-saving treatment through PEPFAR will now linger on waiting lists as their HIV diagnosis becomes a death sentence. And it would slash food and education for the world's poorest children by 50 percent.

These cuts are not abstractions. These are people. Cutting these programs will do almost nothing to reign in our budget deficit, but it will cost thousands of lives. And by reducing our diplomatic capacity around the globe, we will increase the threats to our own country.

I know Secretary Clinton feels as strongly as I do about the necessity of maintaining our global commitments. She has been an ardent advocate and tireless practitioner of American diplomacy. I welcome you here today, and I look forward to your testimony.

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