

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PATRICK LEAHY
DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
FY 2015 BUDGET REQUEST
HEARING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY
MARCH 13, 2014

We are here to discuss President Obama's Fiscal Year 2015 budget for the Department of State and foreign operations.

Mr. Secretary, welcome. I want to say how impressed I am by the way you have embraced what can only be described as one of the most challenging jobs in the world. It is hard to imagine anyone more qualified for it, and we are very fortunate to have you there.

I also want to recognize our committee chairwoman, Senator Mikulski, who has long been an active member and strong supporter of this subcommittee. Thanks to her and Senator Shelby, we got our bills done last year and we are going to do everything possible to finish our work this year by October 1st.

I also want to acknowledge Senator Graham. He travels around the world to see how programs are working – or not working – and he has been a strong defender of this budget and the important national interests it protects.

This subcommittee has produced bipartisan bills for as long as I have been here, and we intend to work the same way this year.

The world today is focused on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but there is also Iran, Syria, Egypt, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, North Korea, Venezuela, Sudan – it is an exhausting list. The Secretary is juggling them all.

Yet with everything else going on, it is almost as if Congress and the American people have forgotten about Afghanistan and Iraq, two enormously costly military adventures that went terribly awry. We and the people of those countries will be paying for those mistakes, and for the care of our wounded soldiers and their families, for lifetimes to come.

Around the world, civil society organizations and journalists are harassed and persecuted. Many are forced to flee their countries. The independence of the judiciary, fundamental to any democracy and fragile in many countries, is under threat.

Violence and discrimination against women; shortages of water, energy and food; climate change; religious extremism; the trafficking in arms, drugs, people, and wildlife – there is no issue that the Secretary or this subcommittee can ignore.

The world today looks more dangerous to many of us than it did during the Cold War, and I don't think anyone can credibly say that the Administration's 2015 budget request for this subcommittee is excessive.

In fact, it is \$536 million below the 2014 level. While our costs in Iraq have decreased there are several areas where I see potential problems, particularly the cut in funding for refugees and other humanitarian programs.

I also worry about the Western Hemisphere, including Colombia. If there is a peace agreement to try to end that conflict -- and I support what President Santos is doing, at some political risk to himself -- we will want to help him secure the peace.

With the many challenges we face as a Nation and the costly mistakes since 9/11 that damaged our image and eroded our influence, I would like to think that at least when it comes to foreign policy, Democrats and Republicans can learn from history and find ways to speak with one voice.

I would like to think that after fighting two long, inconclusive wars the Secretary's diplomatic efforts in the Middle East and with Iran would have strong bipartisan support.

We do not need a Democratic foreign policy or a Republican foreign policy. We need an American foreign policy that is consistently rooted in our values and the example we set, and which we can credibly ask others to follow.

After Senator Graham makes his opening remarks we will hear from Chairwoman Mikulski, and then Mr. Secretary the floor will be yours.

We will then have 7-minute rounds of questions in order of appearance.

#####