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Committee Debates Law of the Sea Treaty



WASHINGTON, DC
Thursday, June 14, 2012

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee heard from top government officials about the Law of the Sea Convention, a United Nations (UN) treaty governing international waterways. The U.S. is the only major country that has not ratified the treaty.

The morning hearing focused on the perspective of the U.S. military. Witnesses included Adm. James Winnefeld Jr., Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Navy Adm.

Jonathan Greenert, Chief of Naval Operation; and several top naval commanders.

The afternoon hearing examined how the law will drive related U.S. policy. Former defense officials provided a historic interpretation along with a forward-minded approach to implementing the law. Witnesses included former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld; former Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte; former legal adviser for the State Department John Bellinger III; and Heritage Foundation policy expert Steven Groves.

In May, the [same committee](#) heard from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. Both called for the U.S. participate with other nations and cited national security, job creation and oil exploration as reasons to join the treaty.

Committee Chair John Kerry (D-MA) has said that he won't bring up the treaty for a Senate vote until after the election, to avoid politicizing the issue.

Twenty-six Republican senators say they oppose signing the treaty because it would undermine U.S. sovereignty. They argue that it will restrict military movements and limit the ability of the U.S. to gather intelligence within its territorial waters.

Not including the U.S., the Law of the Sea Convention has been endorsed by 161 countries and the European Union. The treaty was adopted by the U.N in July 1994 and signed by President Clinton, subject to ratification.

Updated: Thursday at 5:02pm (ET)

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