



U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

**Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr.
Opening Statement (As Delivered)
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing
“The President’s Foreign Affairs Budget”
February 13, 2008**

Secretary Rice, welcome back to the Committee.

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge the loss of our colleague, and my friend, Tom Lantos, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. We sometimes throw around the words “colleague” and “friend” a little loosely. Tom was genuinely and profoundly both. I can’t begin to express how much I will miss him.

I would also like to welcome our newest member of the Committee, Senator Barrasso, who was appointed last evening, taking the place of Senator Sununu, who left this Committee to take a seat on the Finance Committee.

Today the Committee meets to hear from the Secretary of State on the President’s budget for foreign affairs for fiscal year 2009.

The budget submitted to Congress last week seeks \$39.5 billion in spending for foreign affairs, a substantial increase over last year, no matter how you slice it.

I commend you for persuading the President to continue to expand the foreign affairs budget.

I am particularly pleased by the nearly \$250 million in funding requested for the Civilian Stabilization Initiative.

This builds on legislation that Senator Lugar and I developed four years ago, to establish a corps of active duty and reserve civilian personnel that we can send overseas on short notice to address post-conflict needs and humanitarian crises.

We still have some unfinished business here – the latest version of our legislation has been stalled in the Senate for nearly a year. It is my hope we can unglue it and get it passed.

I am also pleased that you are working to increase the number of Foreign Service personnel as well as Diplomatic Security agents.

Secretary Powell began the expansion, but it has been offset by the demands of Iraq, and there continue to be reports of personnel shortages in many areas of the Department.

The President's emergency action program for HIV-AIDS has saved more than a million lives. It's a lasting legacy that does right and puts America in a good light.

This year's budget includes \$6 billion for HIV/AIDS. That sounds like a lot of money, and it is, but the reality is the request only marginally increases the program over last year. We're not doubling our investment, as the President says -- we're just barely maintaining it. I believe we can do even better.

So, Madam Secretary, I strongly support most of your budget efforts.

What I don't support – and this is not your responsibility – is the practice of placing tens of billions of dollars for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in a category of so-called “emergency” spending, which the President again exempts from the normal budget rules. I believe it is wrong to force the taxpayers of tomorrow to pay for the wars of today.

Beyond the budget, this is opportunity for you to talk about your policy priorities for the remaining months of the administration. Let me briefly mention a few of mine.

In Iraq, all of us welcome the recent decline in violence.

Our military has done a remarkable job, as it always does. And they've taken advantage of other critical developments, including the “Awakening” movements among Sunnis and the Sadr ceasefire among Shiites.

Unfortunately, political progress – which was the principal aim of the surge – has not followed.

I still see no strategy for achieving what virtually everyone agrees is the key to success in Iraq: a sustainable political settlement that convinces Iraqis they can pursue their interests peacefully, without bullets and bombs.

Without a political settlement, we could easily see a resurgence of violence, no matter how many troops we keep in Iraq.

And we just can't keep this many troops in Iraq much longer. Every day we stay in these numbers is another day of terrible strain on our fighting forces and their families... on our military's readiness and ability to meet other threats to America's security... on our taxpayers and the government's capacity to meet challenges here at home... and on our standing in the world.

The President says our strategy is to “leave on success.” Does that mean that it is his intent to “stay on failure?” Because right now – in the absence of a political strategy for Iraq -- that’s what we’re doing. We’re treading water. That’s better than drowning. But we can’t keep doing it.

I am pleased that both you and Defense Secretary Gates have now clarified that the so-called “framework for normalized relations” that the administration plans to negotiate with the government of Iraq does not include security commitments that would bind us to engage our military in Iraq’s defense.

As I made clear to the President in a letter last December, any such commitment would require the consent of the Senate.

I am also pleased that the President himself finally said on the record that the United States seeks no permanent military bases in Iraq.

I have repeatedly put a prohibition against permanent bases in legislation because the misplaced belief in Iraq and in the wider Arab and Muslim world, that we seek a permanent presence, has been a recruiting tool for Al Qaeda and an accelerant for anti-Americanism.

What I hope to hear from you today, and in the weeks ahead, is just how we get to success. What’s the political strategy in Iraq? What’s the diplomatic strategy to help achieve it?

You know my views. Unless and until we put all our energy into helping Iraqis build what is already in their constitution – a federal system that brings resources and responsibility down to the local and regional level – we will not get anywhere.

Where are we on that? And if you continue to reject that plan – which Congress overwhelmingly endorsed – what is your alternative?

If we should have surged forces anywhere, it’s Afghanistan. I know you’re just back – and Senators Kerry, Hagel and I are about to go.

The Committee will want to hear your ideas for how we turn around a situation that seems to most of us, if not to the administration, to be slipping from our grasp. Violence is up, the Taliban is back, drug production is at an all time high and people seem to be losing faith in the Karzai government’s ability to deliver progress.

Afghanistan’s fate is linked to Pakistan’s future – and so is America’s security. We’ll see what next week’s elections bring.

But no matter what the result, we need to move from a Musharraf policy to a Pakistan policy – one that demonstrates to its moderate majority that we are with them for the long haul with help to build schools, roads and clinics and that demands accountability for the billion dollars in blank checks we keep writing to Pakistan’s military.

Finally, in Darfur, the United Nations and African Union jointly assumed control over the peacekeeping mission on December 31st, but fewer than 10,000 of the 26,000 authorized troops are on the ground.

One reason is Khartoum's obstructionism.

But the other is the pathetic fact that the international community cannot muster the 24 helicopters needed for this mission. I would like to know exactly which leaders you and President Bush have personally contacted to get these helicopters.

There is a lot more to talk about – Kosovo's imminent declaration of independence... your plans for the NATO summit... your efforts in the Middle East... the challenges posed by Iran, Syria and Lebanon.

And this Committee will spend a lot of time in the months ahead on some long term challenges that may seem less urgent but are no less important to America's future:

The emergence of China, India and Russia... the critical issues of energy security and climate change, which Chairman Lugar initiated... and the need for a more effective strategy to advance democracy and combat extremism that recaptures the totality of America's strength.

We won't have time today to cover even a small piece of that agenda. So I hope you'll come back a few times before the year is out.

With that, let me turn to Senator Lugar for his opening remarks.