

**Statement by Douglas A. Silliman  
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Iraq  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
June 21, 2016**

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with the members of this committee to advance U.S. national security interests in Iraq.

I would like to recognize my wife Catherine and our sons for their steadfast support throughout my career. They are all in Kuwait and could not be here with me today, but I certainly would not be here were it not for them.

I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Ambassador Stuart Jones who has very ably led our Embassy in Baghdad for the last two years. The progress we have made against Da'esh is in large part because of his leadership and hard work. I would also like to express my gratitude to the men and women serving the United States in Iraq: the staff of Embassy Baghdad, our Consulates in Erbil and Basrah, and of course, those men and women serving in uniform who are bravely working to help the Iraqis defeat Da'esh.

If confirmed, I hope to support these great Americans as Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq.

If confirmed, my goals will be clear, even if sometimes the tasks required to accomplish them will be difficult. I will continue the fight to defeat Da'esh. I will seek to enhance the safety and security of the United States and of Americans in Iraq, including the staff of the U.S. Mission, deployed military personnel, and private American citizens living and working across Iraq.

I will seek the political reconciliation and regional integration needed for Iraqis to live with each other and their neighbors in peace and prosperity. I will encourage economic reform and development that can spread the benefits of Iraq's great wealth to all its population, and seek to reduce the corruption and mismanagement that bleeds Iraq's resources from the many to the few.

I will work to further all of America's national interests in Iraq and the region, including continuing our strong partnership with the Kurdistan Regional Government; fighting Trafficking in Persons; promoting human rights; supporting Iraq's ethnic and religious minority communities and its underserved and displaced populations.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee:

I am not blind to the realities of Iraq, but I believe I can approach these tasks with the knowledge and experience built up over my 32 years in the Foreign Service. I have already served two years in Iraq, first as Embassy Baghdad's Minister Counselor for Political Affairs, then as Deputy Chief of Mission. I have served nine years in countries that border Iraq: four as Political Counselor at Embassy Amman, three as Deputy Chief of Mission at Embassy Ankara, and, most recently, two years as Ambassador to Kuwait. I have spent most of the rest of my career in the Middle East or South Asia, or working on the Middle East in Washington.

As this Committee knows well from your hearings and visits to the region, Iraq presents challenges. I do not believe that those challenges are insurmountable, but they are certainly hard. But Iraq also offers opportunities – on regional security, economic opportunity and human rights – that I hope to take advantage of as well.

Please permit me to address each of my key goals in turn.

If confirmed, my primary responsibility will be to do everything possible to protect the United States from threats emanating from Iraq. I will continue to support the robust security measures at Embassy Baghdad, Consulate General Erbil and Consulate General Basrah that protect our employees where they live and work. I will work to ensure that the best security information and advice available to me is also available to military commanders and force protection personnel. And I will seek to build the relationships within the Iraqi government to strengthen its commitment to protecting all Americans from harm.

If confirmed, I will continue to help the Iraqi Government combat Da'esh. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Abadi, Iraq invited U.S. forces to lead an international coalition to support local security forces in the fight against Da'esh. Since the fall of 2014, with our help, the Iraqi Security Forces, including Iraqi Peshmerga and Popular Mobilization Forces, have driven Da'esh back. Backed by

U.S. and Coalition air strikes, training, and equipment, Iraqi forces have recaptured approximately 50 percent of the area Da'esh had seized, including the Mosul Dam, Tikrit, Sinjar, Bayji, Ramadi, Hit, and most recently, Rutbah. These victories prove that with U.S. and Coalition support, Iraqi security forces can defeat Da'esh and other insurgent groups. The Iraqi government is grateful for our assistance and wants our continued engagement.

Right now, we are supporting the Iraqis as they seek to retake Fallujah and begin to pressure Mosul. In Fallujah, our Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance assets along with Coalition air strikes are supporting the Iraqi offensive, and the Iraqi military, with the support of the Popular Mobilization Forces, has made great progress. With our Coalition partners and the United Nations, we are helping the Iraqis as they prepare to hold and stabilize the city as well as care for those displaced by the conflict. We are disturbed by allegations of abuse by some of the forces trying to liberate Fallujah against civilians fleeing the fighting. We are, however, encouraged that Prime Minister Abadi has formed a committee to investigate these allegations, and the investigation has already led to reported arrests of alleged perpetrators.

If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to focus on executing a successful Mosul campaign that simultaneously respects the rights of those both fleeing and unable to flee the fighting. The Iraqis understand how important and how hard this fight will be, and that is why we will work closely with the Iraqis to ensure the necessary political and military plans are prepared just as we will assist the security forces taking part in the operation. Equally critical, we will partner with the Iraqi government to address humanitarian and stabilization challenges attendant to the Mosul campaign to ensure gains are sustained. We have seen what the Iraqi Security Forces can do with our help in Ramadi, Tikrit, and elsewhere. I am confident we will see the same success in Mosul.

If confirmed, I will press for political reconciliation and improved Iraqi relations in the region and around the world. Security assistance can only take Iraq so far: reconciliation will be needed to heal the country. We believe that the most effective approach to reconciliation is to start at the local level, building confidence in local security forces and improving access to basic services. When people feel safe in their homes and can provide their families with the essentials, trust can develop between the people and their government. On security, we have emphasized the importance of involving locally-recruited forces in operations to liberate and hold territory freed from Da'esh, and we have supported the efforts of

the Iraqi government to enroll, arm, and train volunteers in Anbar and Ninewa-- including tens of thousands of Sunnis. These forces have been critical to victories in Ramadi and Hit and will play a significant role in the Mosul campaign. We are also working with the Iraqis to reconstitute local police forces, so that when hostilities subside, citizens will have capable police forces drawn from their communities.

For all of their troubles and difficulties, Iraqis want a real voice in governance and are committed to a democratic process. Power has transitioned peacefully between national and provincial governments following elections since 2003 and elections have been largely open and fair, both remarkable achievements in the Middle East. The political upheaval and protests we have seen in Baghdad over the past few months are in part the public manifestations of a people hungry for reform, improved government services, and economic growth. There are also spoilers in both the political arena and among the protesters. Spoilers who seek to further their self-interest by disrupting the political process and committing violent acts. We strongly support the rights of the people to assemble peacefully and protest, but we must also condemn the destructive actions of some protesters in the storming of Parliament on April 30 and a brief second breach of the International Zone on May 20. Prime Minister Abadi has shown his willingness to address the people's demands for change, and we support him in these efforts. But we see also self-interested parties undermining the efforts for reform.

If confirmed, I will urge the restraint, compromise, and unity that are all fundamental to solving Iraq's many daunting problems. Prime Minister Abadi is a valuable partner and a strong ally. Yet our support for a strong, stable, democratic, and unified Iraq is broader than our relationship with any one leader and we seek a partnership with the lawfully-chosen government based on mutual respect and shared objectives. I will continue the work of my predecessor and keep open lines of communication with Iraqis of all political, ideological, and ethnic backgrounds, excluding only those with known links to terrorism.

Looking outside Iraq's borders, further integration of Iraq with its neighbors in the region and the broader international community will yield political, economic, and security dividends. One of the achievements I am most proud of from my time in Kuwait-- along with Ambassador Jones on the other side of the border -- was helping the Iraqis and Kuwaitis expand an already strong bilateral relationship. Kuwait's economic and humanitarian support for Iraq have been vital, including \$4.6 billion in delayed compensation payments and \$210 million pledged and delivered humanitarian assistance. Saudi Arabia's generous \$500

million humanitarian contribution in 2014 and the reopening of its embassy in Baghdad in 2015 were important signals of solidarity against Da'esh. UAE and Qatar have both pledged or provided stabilization support and humanitarian assistance. These were welcome steps, but there is great need for more. The Government of Iraq has been clear that it seeks improved and constructive relations with all its neighbors. If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to encourage the Government of Iraq to expand its engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, and the broader Arab world.

We must also acknowledge the relationship between Iraq and Iran. These countries share a long border, a long history, and a complex relationship, including significant economic ties. We must continue to work within this framework as the fight against Da'esh pushes forward, and ensure that Iran respects Iraqi sovereignty and does not enflame sectarian tensions.

If confirmed, I will press economic reform and development, while continuing our efforts to ensure Iraq has the resources needed for its fight against Da'esh. The global collapse of oil prices has devastated Iraq's revenue, triggering an acute fiscal crisis. Corruption, a bloated public sector, and an over-reliance on oil revenue have exacerbated these problems and highlighted the deep need for Iraq to reform, decentralize, and diversify.

If confirmed, I will seek to enhance our economic and commercial engagement with Iraq. Iraq has the fifth largest proven conventional oil reserves in the world and the second largest in OPEC. Helping the Iraqis to get these resources to market is critical, and Iraqis want the help of American companies. It will also be important to help Iraq to diversify its economy, decentralize economic decision-making and put in place reforms to encourage the development of a viable private sector. This means that decision making must devolve to localities and provinces. While economic reforms are important, a top priority for our mission in Iraq will be to strengthen our commercial ties and promote U.S. companies, products, and services. I will work to ensure that our companies are competing on an even playing field. I will work tirelessly to promote U.S. exports and ensure that government tenders, such as the recent tender for nearly 100,000 tons of rice awarded to U.S. growers, give our companies full and fair consideration.

And this may not be as hard as it now appears. The Iraqi economy grew at 7 percent annually before the arrival of Da'esh, and Iraq can regain an upward

trajectory with wiser management and a real effort to reduce corruption. Here too, we see a desire on the part of Iraqis for continued U.S. and international engagement to strengthen the private sector in order to spur economic growth for all Iraqis.

If confirmed, I will promote the other crucial U.S. national interests in Iraq. It is important for me to highlight that the Kurdistan Regional Government remains a key and trusted political, economic, and military partner. Erbil, like Baghdad, also faces a daunting slate of economic issues. The Kurdish Parliament has not met since October of last year, and the Kurdistan Regional Government's fiscal crisis is also dire. Like Baghdad, the KRG faces economic strain from low oil prices as well as an unprecedented humanitarian emergency. To help alleviate some of these issues, the Department of Defense recently announced up to \$480 million in stipend and logistical support for the Peshmerga, and we were all happy to see the central government in Baghdad commit to share some of its security assistance with the KRG. While these measures will provide immediate relief, the KRG needs to take more permanent reform measures. Like Baghdad, the KRG also has too many employees and too much corruption. Our USAID colleagues are on the ground, providing advisory support as the KRG undertakes structural economic reform and support for the private sector. If confirmed, I will work to expand our cooperation with Erbil and protect the outstanding relationship we have developed over years of close cooperation.

I want to stress that while Mosul Dam remains a top concern, Iraq has come a long way in taking responsibility for the issue. Our goal is to prevent a catastrophe from taking place, but if it does occur, we have plans in place to evacuate our people and deal with the humanitarian crisis likely to be caused by the massive flooding. We continue to engage the international community on this issue because a dam breach would literally and figuratively change the landscape of Iraq during our fight against Da'esh.

It will also be a priority to uphold our long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of religious freedom and ethnic minorities. We are focused on the dire situation of all Iraqi communities, including Christians, Shabak, Yezidis, Kaka'i, Sabeen-Mandean, Turkmen, Shia, Sunni, and members of other groups, who have suffered at the hands of Da'esh. We see the first priority in this effort as assisting Iraqi Security Forces, including Peshmerga, in defeating Da'esh. This is essential to the protection of human rights and religious diversity in the region. The U.S. response to Da'esh atrocities, however, involves more than military action. We will be supporting efforts to collect, document,

preserve, and analyze the evidence of atrocities, including through forensic evidence in mass graves, and we will do all we can to see that the perpetrators are held accountable. On April 8, Secretary Kerry announced an additional \$155 million in humanitarian assistance to help vulnerable Iraqis inside Iraq and across the region. That brings the total to \$778 million since FY 2014. We continue to work with the Government of Iraq to make sure its institutions are more representative and inclusive, and to promote security and freedom for religious minorities in Iraq, including areas liberated from Da'esh.

Once security is established, we will continue to support Iraqi-led local efforts to establish the conditions that will allow for the safe and voluntary return of displaced citizens. Working with the UN Development Program, the United States and 18 international partners have funded a stabilization mechanism that emphasizes quick projects that help restore basic services like water and electricity, reopen schools and health clinics, and provide grants to businesses trying to reopen. Our support has helped contribute to stabilization efforts that have allowed nearly 700,000 displaced Iraqis – including 95 percent of the families from the Sunni city of Tikrit – return to their homes, and we are seeing the same effort underway in Ramadi. To make the stabilization efforts more sustainable, we have provided technical assistance to the effort, championed by the Prime Minister, to decentralize federal authority over many government services. Empowering local governments with responsibility over these services gives communities a greater stake in their governance and has the potential to improve service delivery. The implications of decentralization go far beyond liberated areas – greater local authority will improve governance throughout Iraq.

Finally, I will press forward the Department's efforts to combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP), which has been a longstanding personal commitment. Iraq has taken notable steps to fight trafficking, despite the fact that its abilities to do so were severely hindered by extreme security challenges and budget constraints. The Government of Iraq has targeted both labor and sex traffickers. It sharply increased its investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases, resulting in 119 prosecutions in 2015 compared to 39 in 2014. The GOI assigned more police officers to TIP enforcement in every province. The government's inter-ministerial anti-TIP committee met throughout the year, provided anti-TIP and shelter management training, and lobbied to pass bylaws to improve implementation of the anti-TIP law. The government also provided training to military officers on child soldier issues. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement and, if confirmed, I will engage with Iraqis at the highest levels to press for greater attention and effort to this issue.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the committee:

If confirmed, I look forward to your continued support and invite you to come see the good work that American civilian and military personnel are doing to further U.S. interests in Iraq. I thank you for the opportunity to testify, and look forward to answering your questions.