

Lugar Statement on Chris Hill to be Ambassador to Iraq

I join in welcoming our distinguished nominee, Ambassador Christopher Hill. During his 32-year career, he has led three embassies and served as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. In that position, he was the Bush Administration's point man at the Six Party Talks on North Korea. As Assistant Secretary, Chris Hill demonstrated outstanding diplomatic and managerial skills in dealing with one of our most difficult foreign policy challenges. His innovative and meticulous approach contributed to successes, including the ongoing disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear complex in the presence of American monitors, the re-entry into North Korea of IAEA officials, and the potential transition of the Six Party process into a forum for broader multi-lateral engagement in Northeast Asia.

I have appreciated Mr. Hill's accessibility to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In addition to nine appearances before the Committee in the last five years, he has always been willing to meet with us privately about developments on the Korean Peninsula or elsewhere in East Asia.

Through the confluence of many factors, Iraq is showing positive trend lines. American casualties are at their lowest mark since the conflict began six years ago. The Iraqi government held successful elections last month, and those provincial councils are convening, electing chairmen, and beginning to set their agendas.

But progress in Iraq remains vulnerable to political rivalry, outside interference, and the slow pace of economic reconstruction. Government institutions at all levels remain underdeveloped, inefficient, and subject to corruption. The economy, which grew at a rate of 3.5% in the first two quarters of 2008, has slipped as oil prices have dropped. Oil production rates are flat, and reduced revenues may slow the efforts of Iraq's government to make necessary infrastructure investments. Unemployment and underemployment remain high.

Ambassador Crocker and General Odierno describe Iraq's progress as fragile and reversible. With this in mind, we need the clearest analysis possible of the likely effects of downsizing the U.S. military presence. We also need a more definitive outline of the mission of the 50,000 troops that will remain in Iraq. Without a detailed mission statement, it is impossible to judge whether this force is appropriate. We also need to understand how the civilian components of the American presence, including the Embassy and PRTs, will be affected by the downsizing of the military operation.

The Six Party process that Ambassador Hill oversaw required the U.S. diplomatic team to address issues pertaining to the entire region. I believe success in Iraq will increasingly depend on regional factors involving the activities of both friends and adversaries. We must seek to reassure allies and send adversaries the clear message that the United States remains committed to regional stability and has no intention of leaving a vacuum in Iraq that could be exploited.

Prime Minister Maliki's outreach to Sunnis has already reduced tensions among Iraq's Sunni neighbors. Leaders from Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and virtually all of the Gulf States,

including Kuwait, have paid high-level visits and appointed ambassadors, indicating acceptance of the Shia-run government.

Across the region, and internationally, the incentive structure for involvement in Iraq is fundamentally different than it was two years ago. Coupled with the drawdown, the time is right to expand our engagements, solidify regional security gains, and cultivate more robust regional and international cooperation in Iraq. Ideally, this cooperation would include regular and wide-ranging talks with neighboring states on broader issues of regional security. One of the purposes of these talks must be to avoid surprise and miscalculation in the region that could ignite further conflict.

Trilateral talks between the United States, Iraq, and Turkey could be expanded to include more participants such as Syria and Jordan, and more issues, such as displaced Iraqis. Trilateral talks with Iran and Iraq should recommence and perhaps include more of Iraq's neighbors and other concerned powers.

We should seek to facilitate Iraq's return to regional and international institutions, which could reduce our long-term burdens. Iraq may not need development assistance, but it does need trading partners, and expanded diplomatic and technical help from international agencies.

I look forward to hearing Ambassador Hill's views on these and many other topics. I appreciate his willingness to accept this difficult post, especially after several years of intense diplomatic activity. I thank the Chairman.

###