

Assistant Secretary of State-Designate Jeffrey D. Feltman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 14, 2009

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee, and other members of Congress, to advance U.S. interests in a region where we face some of the most significant challenges to American foreign policy in our nation's history.

I would like to introduce my wife, Mary Draper, a fellow Foreign Service Officer. We both feel a profound sense of honor to have represented the United States abroad for most of our foreign service careers.

I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Clinton for entrusting me with the responsibility, if confirmed by the Senate, to lead what we in the State Department refer to as the NEA bureau. As I know first-hand, NEA is blessed with talent in its foreign and civil service staff in Washington as well as in its American and locally-engaged staff abroad. NEA is a great team, and I have been proud to call it my "home bureau" since 1993.

But, to help address the complicated foreign policy challenges posed by the Middle East and North Africa, NEA needs to be part -- a leading part -- of even larger teams. Within the State Department, we are partners with distinguished Special Envoys and Advisors assigned by the President and Secretary to address specific issues. We are also committed to working hand-in-hand with the Department's other regional and functional bureaus, USAID, colleagues in other civilian agencies and the Department of Defense. Our civilian-military partnership in Iraq has been particularly successful.

If confirmed, I shall do all possible in support of former Senator Mitchell's efforts to advance a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My service at our diplomatic missions in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem left me with a firm conviction that this outcome would provide the best means to guarantee Israel's security and to fulfill the Palestinians' aspirations for a state of their own. History teaches us modesty as we face the Israeli-Arab conflict, but I believe it is strongly in the United States' interest to move forward as quickly as possible toward a comprehensive peace between Israel and all of its neighbors.

The President's speech of February 27 set forth our national strategy to end the war in Iraq responsibly, leaving a nation that is sovereign, stable and self-reliant. It includes the completion of our combat mission in Iraq by August 31, 2010. I am immensely proud of our courageous colleagues at Embassy Baghdad and on the Provincial Reconstruction Teams -- both American and locally employed staff -- who work with civilian and military counterparts to ensure the successful implementation of this strategy. Their dedication reflects a great tradition

of service. If confirmed, I would do my utmost to support their efforts, including through our engagement with regional governments. Iraq's neighbors have an instrumental role to play in support of a successful outcome in Iraq. Whether in Iraq, the region, or Washington, when my colleagues and I work in support of this outcome, we do so mindful of the efforts of our courageous troops, and in particular of the close to 4300 American service members who have sacrificed their lives in Iraq on behalf of our country over the past six years.

Indeed, I am proud of NEA colleagues who serve under challenging circumstances throughout the region. At six of our posts, in addition to those in Iraq, there are prohibitions or restrictions on family members accompanying American employees during their assignments. If I am confirmed, I would dedicate myself to the security, morale, and professional development of NEA personnel. This would include a determined commitment to equal opportunity to maximize the diversity and talent of our team. It also would include efforts to ensure our representatives abroad have the skills and training they need, with special focus on the areas of foreign language and public diplomacy -- essential tools for our effectiveness in the region. I shall work with my colleagues in the Consular Affairs bureau to ensure that our posts in the Near East provide effective and efficient services to Americans residing and traveling abroad, as well as to foreigners seeking to visit the United States for business, education, or other legitimate purposes. Serving U.S. citizens abroad is any U.S. chief of mission's highest duty. I know this personally, as I was the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon when, in partnership with the military, we had to carry out the evacuation of 15,000 American citizens during the 2006 Hizballah-Israel war.

If confirmed, I would be privileged to lead my NEA colleagues in implementing what Secretary Clinton has called a new diplomacy powered by partnership, pragmatism, and principle. Our partners in the Near East must be given confidence that our commitment to their security and the region is enduring. If confirmed, I shall seek to build on existing mechanisms for diplomatic engagement -- both bilateral and multilateral. We have an established history of important partnerships with Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. We must continue to work closely with Yemen to address the threat of instability both to the country itself and to its neighbors.

In the Maghreb, we have a diverse range of diplomatic relationships ranging from the centuries old to the only recently renewed. Each of our relationships with the countries of the region is unique. Several of these relationships involve significant challenges. Given the vital interests we have in the security of key partners, our own energy security, and the stability of the region, it is in our pragmatic interest to make each of these relationships as productive as possible in support of our national priorities.

Pragmatism and principle come together in our approach to countries that have been a source of much of the region's instability. If confirmed, I would work closely with Department and interagency colleagues in support of a policy of principled engagement with Iran. As the

Secretary has said, we are deploying new approaches to the threat posed by Iran with our eyes wide open and with no illusions. In pursuit of this engagement, we will ensure that Iran and the entire region understand that our commitment to the security of our partners in the Near East, both Israeli and Arab, is non-negotiable, as is the imperative of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapons capability, and ending its support for terrorism.

Similarly, we are seeing whether direct engagement with Syria could help address some serious foreign policy concerns in the region. We believe that Syria and the U.S. share common interests in stabilizing Iraq and reaching a comprehensive peace in the region and we hope that our efforts to engage with Syria diplomatically will lead to concrete progress in the region. Talks with Syria will not, however, come at the expense of third countries. As Secretary Clinton assured the Lebanese just over two weeks ago in Beirut, the United States will not sacrifice Lebanon's interests in our sincere attempt to improve relations with Syria.

If confirmed, I shall always keep in mind that the developments in the Near East have global reach. The sustained stability and prosperity of the Near East would be of great benefit to the United States, economically as well as strategically. The region includes hydrocarbon resources and significant investment funds of global importance. Also of global consequence, along with our partners, we must combat far reaching violence and extremism to which we, the peoples of the region, and the rest of the world are vulnerable, as we have seen far too often, most horrifically in our own country on September 11, 2001.

Consistent with America's democratic ideals, if confirmed, I shall make it a priority to work with both colleagues in the Department of State and USAID to address deficits in political openness, good governance, economic and educational opportunity, human rights, and the status of women. Political, social, and economic progress must be led by those in the region, but these efforts merit strong U.S support through both diplomacy and resources. We will continue to support those courageous defenders of human rights, civil society, and democracy.

If confirmed, I shall dedicate myself to the full use of all diplomatic tools including public diplomacy, as well as foreign assistance, to deploy what Secretary Clinton has called "smart power". This will require significant resources, and if confirmed by the Senate, I would do my utmost to ensure responsible oversight of our use of taxpayer dollars so that they are used as efficiently as possible to achieve the purposes for which they were appropriated.

Since I joined the Foreign Service in 1986, I have spent most of my overseas career in the Near East. I have been repeatedly struck by the centrality of our diplomacy in the region to advancement of America's vital interests and our national security. The success of this diplomacy depends heavily on close consultation between our executive and legislative branches. If confirmed by the Senate, I would look forward to close collaboration with this committee and other members of Congress to further our nation's foreign policy goals in the Near East.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.