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Opening Remarks Before the Senate Appropriations Committee

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC
February 27, 2007

As Delivered

(3:25 p.m. EST)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senator Cochran. Thank you, members of the committee, and I am honored to testify alongside Secretary Gates for the first time.

Mr. Chairman, I have a longer written statement that I would like to be entered into the record about the full supplemental request, the critical funding that will be provided by the supplemental for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, for ongoing State Department operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, for emergencies in Sudan, for reconstruction in Lebanon and so forth. But I will restrict my comments to a few concerning particularly Iraq.

SENATOR BYRD: You may proceed as you like.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you, sir. Across the board in Iraq, Iraqis are now in the lead and we're supporting them. To support the new strategy in Iraq that President Bush announced in January (inaudible) supplemental funding for Iraq this year. These resources will enable the State Department to support the Iraqi Government and to support our counterinsurgency strategy alongside our military in order to bring a new civilian surge on multiple fronts.

We are supporting the Iraqis in an economic offensive. Iraq's Council of Representatives recently passed a budget for 2007, including a plan to devote \$10 billion of its own money for reconstruction and development. This is an encouraging step, but they need our technical assistance in matters like budget execution and ministry capacity, and this supplemental will help with those matters.

We are also supporting the Iraqis in their political offensive. Yesterday, Iraq's Council of Ministers approved a

hydrocarbon framework law. They will now transmit it, along with accompanying legislation, to the Council of Representatives. This is an important step and we hope that it builds momentum for the Iraqi Government to make further progress, particularly on de-Baathification, on increased support for displaced Iraqis, both Shia and Sunni, who wish to return to their homes.

When I met with Prime Minister Maliki last week in Baghdad, I urged him to waste no time in finding resolution to critical issues of national reconciliation. At the same time, we recognize that Iraq has a federal government and that its provinces have significant responsibility. And so this supplemental funding provides the funding to allow us to double the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq, focusing on Baghdad but also beyond in key provinces like Anbar. We are doubling the number of personnel within our existing PRTs and our expanded PRT strategy will enable us to decentralize and diversify our civilian presence in Iraq, thereby increasing our chances of success.

Again, I would emphasize here that we're transitioning our role. This is to help Iraqis build their own democratic institutions and lead their own economic development at the provincial and local levels.

Let me say one other thing about the PRTs. Our previous strategy called for 10 teams in Iraq. We have met that goal. Those Provincial Reconstruction Teams are fully staffed, fully deployed and fully operational. Under the new strategy, we will now move from 10 to 20 PRTs. We have already identified all of the Foreign Service officers who will lead these new teams and we expect them to arrive in Iraq before the end of March.

To staff the PRTs, the President has asked the State Department to recruit additional civilian specialists from other federal agencies and from the nation at large. These are people like agronomists, veterinarians, city planners and others. No diplomatic service in the world has these specialties and we have therefore asked the Department of Defense to fill the first rotation of about 100 specialist positions. Our supplemental request will then enable us to hire about 300 new civilians for this mission. It will allow us to reimburse other government agencies when we recruit their personnel and to send them out quickly to join the diplomats who are already in the field doing the political work that is so important.

So we are advancing politically, economically and of course militarily. I would like to take one moment to talk about our diplomatic offensive, the fourth leg of our strategy, to build greater support both within the region and beyond for peace and prosperity in Iraq. We are recommitting ourselves to the security and stability of the Gulf region. We have rallied our traditional partners, responsible governments like those of the Gulf states, plus Egypt and Jordan -- or, as it is called, GCC+2 -- and we are working with those governments to support embattled democratic leaders like Prime Minister Siniora in Lebanon, President Abbas in the Palestinian territories and Prime Minister Maliki in Iraq. We are also continuing to rally international support for Iraq's political and economic success in the form of the International Compact for Iraq. In March, dozens of countries will gather at the United Nations to finalize agreements on the compact. This compact outlines international responsibilities to Iraq as Iraq meets its responsibilities to its own people.

There's an additional component to this diplomatic offensive that I would like to highlight today. It is a new component. Prime Minister Maliki believes and President Bush and I agree that success in Iraq requires the positive support of Iraq's neighbors. This is one of the key findings, of course, of the Iraq Study Group and it is an important dimension that many in the Senate and in the Congress have brought to our attention and I've had very fruitful discussions about how to do this. So I'm pleased to inform you that the Iraqis are launching a new diplomatic initiative which we are going to fully support.

The Government of Iraq is preparing for an expanded neighbors meeting first at the sub-ministerial level that will take place in Baghdad in the first half of March. Invitees would include Iraq's immediate neighbors, as well as representatives from other regional states, multilateral organizations and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council including of course the United States. This initial meeting will be followed perhaps as early as the first half of April by a ministerial level meeting with the same invitees that is regional states, neighbors, international organizations and the Permanent 5 of the UN, as well as perhaps the members of the G-8.

I would note that the Iraqi Government has invited all of its neighbors, including Syria and Iran, to attend both of these regional meetings. We hope that all governments will seize this opportunity to improve the relations with Iraq and to work for peace and stability in the region. I'm pleased that the Government of Iraq is launching this new diplomatic initiative and that we will be able to support it and participate in it. The violence occurring within the country has a decided impact on Iraq's neighbors. And Iraq's neighbors as well as the international community have a clear role to play in supporting the Iraqi Government's efforts to promote peace and national reconciliation within the country.

So far from just a military campaign, our efforts in Iraq are moving forward on all fronts at the same time: security, political, economic and diplomatic. America's diplomatic corps, of course, is not an expeditionary force, but our men and women are playing their roles superbly in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. They are enduring long and difficult deployments far away from their families. Many are even working on the front lines in dangerous places like Anbar and Baghdad, working shoulder to shoulder with our soldiers and Marines. Every day, our civilians are taking mortar fire, risking attacks just to do their jobs. And then they get up the next day and they go back out and they do it all again.

The men and women of the Department of State are patriots and they make us all extremely proud and I ask you to provide them with the resources that they need so urgently to be successful in the vital mission that they perform, a mission that together, with our men and women in uniform, will help us to win the war on terror and to make us safer. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN BYRD: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Thank you.

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