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Iraq: An Update From the Field

Ambassador Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

Testimony at a Hearing on Iraq, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Washington, DC
July 19, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman. It is with pleasure that I appear before the Committee for the first time since my confirmation hearing in February. Last week, the President submitted to Congress an interim assessment of the Government of Iraq's progress toward achieving a number of political, economic, and security benchmarks.

I believe it is a fair assessment which demonstrates that while the Government of Iraq is making some progress, there is still much to do and much room for improvement. As we approach September, I and other senior-level Embassy officials are –

on a daily basis – personally engaging with the highest levels of the Government of Iraq to make clear that progress on the benchmarks is imperative, to suggest ways forward, and to serve as honest brokers to promote compromise. At the working level, we also maintain daily contact with members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, from committee heads to rank-and-file members, to monitor progress and serve as advocates for agreement on, and passage of, key legislation.

We do much of our work discreetly. Those who would like to see our efforts fail in the hopes of stalling forward momentum past September 15 are quick to recast our efforts as U.S. coercion and infringements upon Iraqi sovereignty. Recently, there were public demonstrations in Iraq's number one "oil city," Basra, condemning American pressure

toward passage of a hydrocarbons law. But discreet should not be confused with ineffective, and we continue to make progress.

I would like to add a general note of caution, however, about benchmarks. The benchmarks can be a useful metric; but the longer I am here, the more I am persuaded that progress in Iraq cannot be analyzed solely in terms of these discrete, precisely defined benchmarks because, in many cases, these benchmarks do not serve as reliable measures

of everything that is important – Iraqi attitudes toward each other and their willingness to work toward political reconciliation.

For example, I think if the Committee examines the legislative benchmarks, it is quite possible that Iraq could achieve few of them over the coming months and yet actually be moving in the right direction. Conversely, I think it is possible that all the legislative benchmarks could be achieved without making any real progress toward reconciliation. Merely passing legislation without a broad consensus of all major Iraqi communities will not meet the goals of real or lasting reconciliation. Moreover, passing laws without the requisite consensus will undermine the political will for implementation on the ground following enactment. The benchmarks are useful tools if we remain focused on the broader context – the fundamental reconciliation issues facing Iraq that the benchmark legislation represents.

Furthermore, I would note that the framework of these benchmarks focuses on the central government's capabilities and does not capture achievements made at the Provincial

level. The progress in the Provinces, if properly nurtured, could be the basis for more substantial reconciliation efforts: a grassroots effort that produces security and prosperity for the citizens of Iraq.

Our Provincial Reconstruction Teams report that local governments are taking the initiative – meeting the basic security needs of their citizens, planning and budgeting for reconstruction projects, and taking control of their futures by resisting al-Qaida. It is this kind of activity that provides a level of encouragement that potential shortcomings at the national level may be offset by the affirming activities of state and local governments. Moreover, Iraqis at the local level are seeing the results of an improved political and economic process which is critical for a broader national reconciliation.

Realizing that local government, small business, services and employment must play a vital part in the stabilization and sustainability of a self-governing Iraq, we have sharply increased the number of our PRTs, and we are strengthening their staffs. We have deployed ten new PRTs this year and four more will be coming in early September. I have to be honest and say we have not yet deployed enough people in those teams, and we are in the process of expediting staffing efforts.

I know the Committee is interested in our New Embassy Compound – a project which has benefited from your support. Overseas Buildings Operations Director Williams has assured us, as well as the Congress, that the NEC is on schedule and on budget for completion in September. We seek to move personnel into the safer NEC quarters as

quickly as possible following installation of the necessary communications, logistical and other support services.

I look forward to your questions and thoughts.

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