

Statement by Matthew H. Tueller
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Iraq
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the next Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Iraq. First, let me express my gratitude to the President and the Secretary of State for their confidence in me. If confirmed by the Senate, I pledge to work closely with the Members of this committee to defend and advance U.S. interests in Iraq.

I would like to recognize my wife DeNeece who is here with me today and express my great appreciation to her. She has provided steadfast support throughout my Foreign Service career, including during periods of separation when I served at unaccompanied posts such as Iraq and Yemen and during periods where she and other U.S. Embassy family members were evacuated from posts in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Along with our five children, DeNeece and I have had the privilege of representing the United States abroad under many challenging but rewarding circumstances. I would not be here today but for their love and support.

I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Ambassador Doug Silliman who very ably led our Embassy in Baghdad over the last two-and-a-half years. He oversaw the United States' support for the liberation of all ISIS-controlled territory in Iraq, helped coordinate massive international aid to Iraqis struggling to recover from the scourge of ISIS' devastation of large areas of their country, set the stage for Iraq's integration into the global economy and helped marshal international assistance to help rebuild areas that were devastated in the course of the fight against ISIS, all efforts I will build on if confirmed as ambassador.

If confirmed, I will draw on my leadership and policy execution experience in the Middle East for my new duties in Iraq: including service as Ambassador to Yemen, Ambassador to Kuwait, Deputy Chief of Mission in Cairo, and Political Minister Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad from 2007-2008 under the leadership of Ambassador Ryan Crocker.

Our relationship with Iraq remains a critical one for the national security interests of the United States, and if confirmed I will do my utmost to advance U.S. interests there. However, let me stress from the outset that there will be no greater priority for me than the safety and security of all Americans residing in Iraq. As a diplomat who participated in the 2007-2008 "surge," I understand the importance of U.S. engagement in Iraq. The next several years will be crucial for Iraq as it struggles to recover from the trauma of ISIS and continues to actively confront a persistent ISIS threat. We stand ready to help as a trusted and valued partner.

Our long-standing principal objective continues to be to bolster Iraq as a sovereign, stable, united, and democratic partner of the United States. We must remain engaged to ensure that Iraq can fend off the internal and external threats, including threats from Iran, to its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

Our determination to see Iraq become a pillar of stability in the Middle East stands in stark contrast to Iran's agenda, which seeks to exploit divisions, weaken state institutions, and foster extremism. Where the United States seeks to help Iraq build professional security forces loyal to the state, Iran seeks to cultivate irregular forces operating outside the full control of the government. Where the United States seeks to help Iraq ensure the rule of law, Iran encourages the tactics of organized criminal enterprises. Where the United States provides Iraq with expert advice and funding to promote clean drinking water in Basrah, Iran promotes a flood of sub-standard agricultural products, as well as low-quality pharmaceuticals and illicit drugs like heroin onto Iraqi streets and into Iraqi homes. In short, Iran wants to keep Iraq weak and dependent. If confirmed, I will work to make Iraq strong and sovereign.

I recognize that such plain speaking may make some of Iraq's leaders nervous. They know all too well that for Iraqis, there is a price for speaking up in defense of Iraq's sovereignty. During my service as U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, I saw first-hand how Iran works to undermine regional peace rather than advance it. We cannot turn a blind eye to Iran's interference in Lebanon, Bahrain, and Syria either, and of course Iraq. Iran and its proxies threaten our interests and the security of our friends and allies, including Iraq's Sunni neighbors and Israel.

I would also like Iraqis to know that we do not seek to sever them from Iran, a nation with which they share a border, history, and culture. What we are seeking is for Tehran to have normal relations with Iraq, relations that are rooted not in armed groups and criminal activity, but in trade and exchanges that fully respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi government and people.

To help offset the impact of Iran's harmful meddling in Iraq, we must continue to build on our successful diplomatic efforts to reintegrate Iraq into the region, particularly among Arab states. Good relations between Iraq and neighbors willing to play a constructive role is a powerful counterweight to Iran's malign influence. As Secretary Pompeo recently observed, last year the Iraqis largely rejected sectarianism in their national election. Under Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi, President Barham Salih, and Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali al-Hakim, Iraq enjoys an unprecedented relationship with Kuwait and has strengthened ties with Jordan, having received a visit from King Abdullah and inaugurated a joint industrial zone along their border. If confirmed, I will prioritize fostering those revived relationships.

The Strategic Framework Agreement for a Relationship of Friendship and Cooperation remains the foundation for developing U.S.-Iraq relations in a variety of fields especially in the economic sphere and, if confirmed, I will build on that foundation to achieve key U.S. goals for Iraq.

Iraq's most pressing need is for continuing U.S. security assistance that reinforces the primacy of the Iraqi Security Forces, strengthens their capabilities and deepens their professionalization. In support of our partners in the Iraqi Security Forces, the U.S.-led Global Coalition to defeat ISIS helped Iraq regain control over all its territory and train-and-equip nearly 200,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces. Former Prime Minister Abadi's December 2018 announcement of the liberation of all Iraqi territory from ISIS control was a great moment for Iraq. Together with the U.S.-led Coalition, we must be vigilant to prevent the return of ISIS or the emergence of other terrorist groups.

Our Coalition-wide approach to stabilization in liberated areas set the conditions for more than four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home, with twenty-seven Coalition partners committing over \$1 billion to the UNDP's Funding Facility for Stabilization. Much work remains to ensure the remaining 1.8 million remaining IDPs are able to safely and voluntarily return to their communities and rebuild their lives, as well.

The work of our Coalition is not over. We and our partners are there at the invitation of the Iraqi government, with two dozen other countries helping Iraq ensure its gains against ISIS are lasting. The Coalition must continue to assist the Iraqi Security Forces as they conduct targeted counter-terrorism operations and wide-area security at an exceptionally high operational tempo to combat a growing ISIS insurgency. Iraq was instrumental in advancing the Coalition's military campaign in Syria as well, providing valuable artillery support and airstrikes for the Syrian Democratic Forces' offensive just over the border. Iraq's growing ability to act in partnership with us to defeat threats is one of the truly remarkable developments since 2014.

Despite the gains they have made with our support, Iraq's armed forces are stretched by multiple demands and need continued assistance and training to eradicate ISIS remnants, secure Iraq's borders, and become a source of regional stability. Subsequently, the U.S.-led Coalition must continue to build the capacity of Iraq's legitimate and professional security forces.

If confirmed, I will work hard to advance U.S. interests and enhance our commercial and economic engagement with Iraq, providing new opportunities for U.S. businesses. Iraq's economic system is untenable as it is a command economy that relies on the volatility of the oil price to fund its needs.

The Government of Iraq estimates that Iraq needs almost \$100 billion over the next 10 years for post-ISIS reconstruction and infrastructure repair. If confirmed, I would seek to marshal the resources of the Export-Import bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation to allow the U.S. private sector to bring its much-needed expertise to the task of Iraq's reconstruction. I would encourage the Government of Iraq to prioritize and budget for key reconstruction projects, and to develop new models to attract international financing. At the same time, I would encourage Gulf Cooperation Council members, other partners, and international organizations to accelerate their pledges made during the February 2018 Iraqi-led reconstruction conference in Kuwait, which generated almost \$30 billion in sovereign loan and export credit financing and private sector activity.

If confirmed, I would aim to foster a sustainable Iraqi private sector as an outlet for the 800,000 Iraqis who reach working age every year. The government cannot be the sole source of employment for a country where sixty percent of Iraq's population is under the age of 25. Iraq's current and future stability depends to a large degree on finding work for this disproportionately large youth segment. I would therefore continue our robust economic engagement with the Government of Iraq and encourage Iraqi leaders to accelerate the implementation of critical reforms promised by the current government.

I would also push the Government of Iraq to tackle the issues of corruption and excessive red tape that are holding back Iraq's true economic potential. To that end, I would commend the

government's recent anti-corruption actions and would continue to support a U.S. funded initiative from the UN's Conference on Trade and Development, which is streamlining some of Iraq's bureaucratic processes, increasing transparency both for the Iraqi public and for U.S. investors. I would attempt to persuade the Government of Iraq to modify its deficit-increasing budget which does not live up to its agreement with the International Monetary Fund. This agreement expires in June and I would seek to have both sides negotiate a new program.

A country as wealthy in natural resources as Iraq should be able to produce all of its own electricity. But currently, Iraq flares the majority of its natural gas and at the same time imports a significant amount of overpriced gas from Iran. The World Bank has estimated that Iraq has flared 16 billion cubic meters of gas per year. Not only is this a waste of a resource, but an environmentally unsound practice. If captured and processed correctly, Iraq's flared gas could fuel domestic power stations and industries, diversify Iraq government revenues, and eliminate dependence on Iranian energy imports. It will take years for Iraq to realize its potential, but its government must make decisions now for that to become a reality. I will support the U.S. companies competing for projects in this sector. These projects not only make sense financially and environmentally, but also contribute to our policy of giving Iraq greater autonomy from Iran and denying the Iranian regime revenue.

If confirmed, another priority of mine will be helping the recovery of Iraq's persecuted religious communities, and particularly those that ISIS targeted for genocide. The Administration has programmed nearly \$340 million since fiscal year 2017 to support these communities, including life-saving humanitarian assistance, rehabilitating critical infrastructure, clearing explosive remnants of war, psychosocial and legal services, funding justice and accountability efforts, and providing support for local businesses. While we have seen important progress on these initiatives, there is much more to be done, especially on the part of the Government of Iraq to restore security to these areas. Supporting pluralism and protecting the rights of minorities is integral to the Administration's effort to defeat ISIS, counter violent extremism, deny Iran the ability to exploit sectarian divisions, and promote religious freedom around the world. If confirmed as Ambassador I will emphasize the priority we attach to the safety of these communities. I will support continued U.S. assistance to these groups and work diligently to promote prospects for their survival in Iraq.

To ensure persecuted religious communities' survival and achieve lasting stability, Iraq needs reconciliation to recover from the trauma of ISIS. We are supporting initiatives toward that end. It is not just physical infrastructure that needs to be rebuilt, it is also the deep emotional scars that remain from years of ISIS depredations. With this in mind, the State Department is overseeing programs that include psychosocial counseling to help victims and family members recover from the trauma that ISIS inflicted on them and their communities. It is especially important for Iraq to work through a law-based process to hold ISIS perpetrators and collaborators accountable. A fundamental part of that process is investigating the sites of ISIS crimes and gathering evidence that investigators can marshal in a court of law. To that end, we fully support the work of the UN's Investigative Team for the Accountability of Da'esh, known as "UNITAD," to exhume mass graves in Iraq and collect other important evidence before it is too late.

To fully stabilize and realize its full potential, Iraq also needs to move further from sectarianism and toward a vision for national unity in which all of its communities play a part. Iraqi nationalism remains a potent force, and Iraqis are proud of their ancient heritage and culture. ISIS and other unhelpful actors, want nothing better than to divide and weaken Iraq. We, on the other hand, will continue to support a strong, united Iraq.

The safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons to their home is another vital element for Iraq's stabilization. Since January 2014, more than six million Iraqis have been displaced. The United States and our partners in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS have also provided assistance through the UN Development Program's Funding Facility for Stabilization to help set the conditions for more than 4.1 million Iraqis to return home. We are committed to helping create durable solutions, including local integration or safe and voluntary returns, for the 1.8 million who remain displaced. Our Mission in Iraq engages regularly with UN humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations toward this goal.

It is in our interest to support Iraq's democratic development, but significant challenges remain to the building of durable institutions that will protect the rule of law, the judiciary, and free and fair elections. Iraqis are demanding better governance and ultimately their voices must be heard. Unfortunately, last year's electoral turnout was the lowest since 2005. But through all of the turmoil of the past 15 years, Iraq's core democratic institutions have survived. We will continue to work with the Government of Iraq to provide targeted assistance to help strengthen these critical institutions. I will do my utmost to continue our support for Iraq's democratic development.

The administration believes that a strong Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability and to the enduring defeat of ISIS. We are proud of our longstanding and historic partnership with Iraq's Kurdish people. Not only has this relationship been a bulwark of resistance to terrorism – it has also enabled the promotion and advancement of the U.S. "brand," whether commercial, educational, or cultural. If confirmed, I will seek to further strengthen the already strong bonds between our peoples.

Following the Kurds' 2017 independence referendum, we have been focused on helping leaders in Baghdad and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) mend that relationship. They have made great progress since the appointment of Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi, including an agreement to resume the transportation and export of Kirkuk oil through a KRG-administered pipeline in the north, and another agreement to harmonize customs duties, facilitating the removal of internal GOI customs checkpoints along the internal boundary with the IKR. We will continue to work with Baghdad and Erbil to encourage their efforts to resolve outstanding sources of tension.

If confirmed, I look forward to the support of this committee and an ongoing dialogue to together serve the interests of the American people. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering your questions.