

**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for
Nomination Hearing for Zalmay Khalilzad to be Ambassador to Iraq
June 7, 2005**

The Foreign Relations Committee meets today to consider the nomination of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, to become the next U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. Ambassador Khalilzad has just returned from Kabul, where he has served ably as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan during its critical transition. During his tenure, Afghanistan held an historic election, approved a new Constitution that provides for equal rights for men and women, and established a new Afghan National Army. In announcing his nomination as Ambassador to Iraq, Secretary Rice emphasized that Ambassador Khalilzad “has a proven record of building consensus and achieving results in very tough situations.”

The post of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq certainly qualifies as a tough assignment. Skillfully filled by Ambassador John Negroponte over the past year, the position remains one of the most consequential ambassadorships in American history. The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq leads one of the largest American embassies in the world, with about 1,160 personnel under his authority. American credibility, progress in the war on terrorism, relationships with our allies, and the future of the Middle East depend on a positive outcome in Iraq. What happens there will determine whether we can begin to redirect the Middle East toward a more productive and peaceful future beyond the grip of terrorist influences. Helping the Iraqi people achieve a secure, independent state is a vital U.S. national security priority that requires the highest level of national commitment.

In June 2003 Senator Biden, Senator Hagel, and I led the first Congressional delegation to Baghdad after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. What we witnessed was a country hungry for new leadership and a fresh start. Iraqis were eager to shake off the mantle of oppression, express themselves in public meetings, complain without fear, and, ultimately, achieve results.

Last January, the strength of these impulses was evidenced when eight million Iraqi’s risked their lives to exercise their new freedom to vote. The resulting Iraqi leadership is working hard under difficult circumstances to include Iraq’s Shias, Kurds, and Sunnis -- something never before achieved in an Iraqi government. The cooperation among Iraqi groups thus far has occurred despite the efforts of the insurgents to provoke a civil war or undermine fledgling government institutions though an increasing number of deadly attacks.

The new government must draft a Constitution by August 15th and organize a referendum on it that is planned for October 15th. National elections for a permanent government would follow by December 15th, 2005. As our nominee knows from his experience in Afghanistan, this will require compromises and complex negotiations. The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq must help facilitate this process and meet these tight deadlines without unduly interfering in the internal Iraqi political process.

The acceleration of reconstruction will be central to the success of this endeavor. Thousands of reconstruction projects have been completed so far. Schools, hospitals, and roads have been built; tens of thousands of police and security forces have been trained; and more than 150,000 Iraqis are at work in U.S. funded jobs. But many parts of Iraq still lack a reliable infrastructure – particularly with regard to electricity and clean water. This is a source of great frustration to the Iraqi populace. Tangible results in these areas would strengthen the credibility and reputation of the nascent government and give more Iraqis a reason to support it.

Of the nearly \$21 billion in Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Funds appropriated over the past two years, about \$7.5 billion has been expended -- less than 37 percent. Sabotage and lack of security continue to be the primary causes of delay in providing aid. Moreover, security costs in many areas are soaking up 25 to 40 percent of project funds. In addition, a gap in coordinating mechanisms between our civilian and military organizations has sometimes encumbered the reconstruction effort, as detailed in a recent Foreign Relations Committee staff report. Ensuring that the State Department, Defense Department, and other U.S. agencies in Iraq seamlessly compliment each other must be a high priority for our next ambassador.

Later this month, the United States, the European Union, and the Iraqis will hold a conference in Belgium to improve coordination of international aid to Iraq. Billions of dollars in international pledges to Iraq made in Madrid more than a year and a half ago have not been delivered. The State Department must energize this international support effort and work aggressively to follow through with other donors on commitments they have made.

Today, we look forward to a thorough discussion with Ambassador Khalilzad about his perspectives on Iraq and his plans for providing leadership to our embassy. We recognize the deep personal commitment necessary to undertake this difficult assignment, and we are grateful that an experienced leader has stepped forward.

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