

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**Senator Richard Lugar**  
**Opening Statement for**  
**Ambassadorial Nominations**  
**February 14, 2007**

I join in welcoming our distinguished nominees, Ambassadors William Wood and Ryan Crocker. The posts they would occupy are among the most consequential ambassadorships in American history. They will be at the epicenter of our efforts to secure and reconstruct Afghanistan and Iraq and to help provide those governments with the opportunity to achieve nationhood.

What happens in these countries will deeply affect -- and perhaps determine -- whether the Middle East will move toward more productive and peaceful conditions beyond the grip of terrorist influences and sectarian violence.

Two weeks ago before this Committee, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recalled a half century of U.S. involvement in the Middle East. He argued that this history was not accidental. We have been deeply involved in the region because we have enduring vital interests at stake. Protecting these interests cannot be relegated to a political timeline.

We may make tactical decisions about the deployment or withdrawal of forces, but we must plan for a strong strategic position in the region for years to come. We need to be preparing for how we will array U.S. forces to defend oil assets, target terrorists, deter adventurism by Iran, provide a buffer against regional sectarian conflict, and generally reassure friendly governments that the United States is committed to Middle East and South Asian security. With so much at stake, I am pleased that the President has nominated veteran diplomats and managers to lead the American presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is also vital that the Bush Administration move quickly to fill the ambassadorial post in Pakistan being vacated by Ambassador Crocker. Our relations with that country also are important to U.S. national security. Ambassador Wood's efforts in Afghanistan will be heavily impacted by what happens across the border, and we must ensure that there is no prolonged absence in Islamabad at such a critical time for the region.

Today, we look forward to a thorough discussion with Ambassadors Wood and Crocker about their perspectives on Afghanistan and Iraq and their plans for providing leadership to our embassies. We recognize the deep personal commitment necessary to undertake these difficult assignments, and we are grateful that leaders of their stature and experience are willing to step forward.

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