

Lugar statement on embassy security

Thursday, March 20, 2003

Following is the statement by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Dick Lugar at today hearing on embassy security:

Today the Foreign Relations Committee gathers to discuss the security of our embassies overseas. With our troops engaged in Iraq and the terrorism threat level raised to "high," it is appropriate that we take up this subject. Terrorists who seek to harm the United States but who lack the means to directly attack our homeland have often shifted their focus to U.S. diplomatic posts overseas. Recent attacks on our diplomatic facilities in Karachi, Pakistan and Kabul, Afghanistan, as well as the daily warnings sent to our posts throughout the world, remind us that our diplomats are on the front lines in the war on terrorism. Being a U.S. diplomat today demands enormous courage and dedication. The murder of USAID's Executive Officer Laurence Foley last October in Jordan demonstrated the extreme risks that our diplomats encounter everyday as they represent the United States. It is essential that Congress, the President, and the State Department remain committed to protecting our diplomats and other government representatives overseas to the maximum extent possible. The 1983 and 1984 attacks on the U.S. Embassy and the annex in Beirut, and the horrific double bombing of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, led to the commissioning of the Inman Report and the Crowe Report by the State Department to examine the security needs of our diplomatic missions. Many of the recommendations contained in those reports remain integral parts of today's construction plans. Since 1998 the State Department has embarked on a long-term project to replace, rather than merely upgrade, many of our most vulnerable facilities overseas. The money set aside for replacing posts has grown from just \$9.5 million in 1998 to an estimated \$861 million for the current fiscal year. As we build new embassies, however, we have to recognize that we cannot turn our

buildings into concrete bunkers that are physically and psychologically removed from the world capitals in which our diplomats must work. Indeed, many of our older embassies are located in busy urban areas close to streets. Achieving the goal of embassy security is complicated by the fact that an embassy's purpose is to facilitate contact with the host country. The task of securing embassies, therefore, will require great creativity and the application of new technologies and better construction methods.

Investments in embassy security are paying dividends. Throughout the world, the State Department has worked closely with host countries to improve the security of our diplomatic missions. Although the suicide bombing in Karachi last June tragically killed ten Pakistanis on the outside of the embassy and two Pakistani consulate guards, no one inside the compound was seriously injured, thanks to prudent and timely steps taken to safeguard the building.

While much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. It is estimated that 80 percent of the State Department's overseas facilities do not meet the security standards that were recommended in the mid-1980s. Significant resources must be devoted to securing our embassies, even in an era of tight budgets and pressing security needs at home. This is important, not only for the safety of U.S. personnel, but also for accomplishing the mission of the State Department. If we want to encourage senior Foreign Service Officers -- many of whom have families -- to bid on hardship posts, we must ensure that our facilities are secure.

It is my pleasure to welcome the panel of witnesses we have assembled today to discuss ongoing efforts to improve the safety of U.S. diplomatic personnel overseas.

Testifying before us will be Jess Ford, the Director of GAO's International Affairs and Trade division. The GAO has devoted extensive study to the problem of embassy security, and it has been an indispensable resource on this subject for the Foreign Relations Committee. We are anxious to hear Mr. Ford's report.

We also are fortunate to have General Charles E. Williams, director of the State Department's Bureau of Overseas Building Operations; and Ambassador Francis X. Taylor, Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security.

The Committee looks forward to hearing from General Williams and Secretary Taylor on what has been accomplished over the past several years, as well as what they judge to be the most pressing needs for the future.