

Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Chairman Richard Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing
on
NOMINATION OF AMBASSADOR NEGROPONTE
April 27, 2004

Today, the Foreign Relations Committee meets to consider the nomination of Ambassador John Negroponte to be U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. This post will be one of the most consequential ambassadorships in American history. The ambassador to Iraq not only will be called upon to lead an estimated 1,700 embassy personnel (1,000 Americans and 700 Iraqis), he will be at the epicenter of international efforts to secure and reconstruct Iraq and provide the developing Iraqi government with the opportunity to achieve responsible nationhood.

American credibility in the world, 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 during the next eighteen months almost certainly 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.

With so much at stake, I am pleased that the President has nominated a veteran diplomat and manager to lead the American presence in Iraq. Ambassador Negroponte has served as U.S. ambassador to Honduras, Mexico, and the Philippines. He also has served as an assistant secretary of state and as Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs under the first President Bush. He has been the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations since September 18, 2001, seven days after the September 11 attacks. The contacts and credibility that he has developed at the United Nations will be invaluable. If we are to be successful in Iraq, the United Nations and the international community must play a more central role. U.N. involvement can help us generate greater international participation, improve the political legitimacy of the interim Iraqi government, and take the American face off of the occupation of Iraq. The appointment of an Ambassador who occupies such a high and visible post underscores for our coalition partners and the Iraqis that the American commitment to Iraq is strong and that we mean to succeed.

Last week, the Foreign Relations Committee held three hearings to examine whether American and Iraqi authorities are ready for the transition to Iraqi sovereignty on June 30. These hearings greatly advanced our understanding of the situation in Iraq and helped this Committee answer many questions. But we will hold additional hearings in the weeks to come to monitor progress and illuminate for the American people the challenges and responsibilities that we face in Iraq. The President and other leaders, including members of Congress, must communicate with the American public about our plan in Iraq. American lives will continue to be at risk in Iraq and substantial American resources will continue to be spent there for the foreseeable future.

This nomination hearing is part of our ongoing oversight. I am convinced that the confidence and commitment demonstrated by the pronouncement of a flexible, but detailed plan for Iraq is necessary for our success. Such a plan would prove to our allies and to Iraqis that we

have a strategy and that we are committed to making it work. If we cannot provide this clarity, we risk the loss of support of the American people, the loss of potential contributions from our allies, and the disillusionment of Iraqis.

During the set of three hearings on Iraq last week, I posed six detailed questions as a way of fleshing out a plan for Iraq. I believe that answers to those questions would constitute a coherent transition strategy for Iraq. In pursuit of this clarity, we discussed issues surrounding Ambassador Brahimî's efforts, the status of American armed forces in Iraq after the transition, the role of U.N. Security Council Resolutions, plans for elections, the composition of the U.S. embassy and efforts to provide security for its personnel, and how we intend to pay for the continuing U.S. involvement in Iraq. The Foreign Relations Committee will be persistent in probing for details on these and many other aspects of the Iraq plan.

We have taken up Ambassador Negroponte's nomination in expedited fashion. Processing a diplomatic nomination often requires weeks and sometimes months from the time the President announces it. Through the diligent efforts of the State Department and our own staff, we have accelerated the normal timetable to give Ambassador Negroponte and the Administration a chance to stand up the U.S. Embassy in Iraq as soon as possible. This nomination was announced just last week. With the help of Senator Biden and the other members of this Committee, we intend to vote on it this coming Thursday.

Undersecretary Marc Grossman testified last Thursday about the importance of engaging the interim Iraqi government as soon as it is selected. We cannot simply turn on the lights at the Embassy on June 30 and expect everything to go well. We must be rehearsing with Iraqi authorities and our Coalition partners how decision-making and administrative power will be distributed and exercised. It is critical, therefore, that Ambassador Negroponte and his team be put in place at the earliest possible moment.

Today, we look forward to a thorough discussion with Ambassador Negroponte 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 a leader of his stature and experience is willing to step forward.

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