

Statement by Ambassador John D. Negroponte
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
April 27, 2004

Mr. Chairman, Senator Biden, distinguished Members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the first United States Ambassador to a liberated Iraq. I am honored by the confidence shown in me by President Bush and Secretary Powell. I support the fine work that this committee has done to shape, guide, and inform U.S. policy on this most crucial of foreign policy issues, and, if confirmed, I look forward to our continued close consultation in the weeks and months ahead. I know that members of this committee share my conviction that we must get Iraq right. I look forward to our discussion today and to sharing my thoughts on the mission of our soon-to-be opened Embassy.

Mr. Chairman, in your hearings on Iraq, the committee clearly demonstrated its concerns about the gravity of the situation and the complexity of the challenges we face. My colleagues have addressed many of the important questions you raised and shared with you some of the successes achieved thus far in Iraq -

holding dozens of free local elections, drafting the Transitional Administrative Law, and setting the date for direct nationwide balloting early next year. In addition there have been dramatic improvements in the provision of healthcare, infrastructure projects, and the spread of free media to name but a few examples. But these successes will be for naught if Iraqis cannot weave them into the permanent fabric of their society, building on these successes to produce a stable, peaceful and democratic Iraq -- our core strategic goal.

The sober reality is that destructive and divisive forces are working to undermine progress in Iraq. Coalition forces and Iraqi and international civilians are targeted by disparate elements fanatically opposed to a democratic Iraq. These elements are exploiting and seeking to deepen divisions among Iraq's ethnic, religious and tribal communities, exacerbated by many years of manipulation by Saddam's despotic regime, in order to destabilize Iraq. Our challenge is to establish the conditions by which the Iraqi people can pursue their interests -- as well as celebrate their differences -- through legitimate political channels, rather than through violence and retribution. In short, we must support Iraqis as they build the institutions necessary to do away with Saddam's criminal political system and the winner-take-all attitude that has ruled Iraq for decades.

The courage shown by all Americans working on the ground in Iraq, in dangerous and uncertain conditions, to support the principles we and our Coalition partners share with Iraqis, is humbling. The men and women of our armed forces, of our diplomatic service and from all walks of American life who have come forward to serve our nation in Iraq have made great – and too often the ultimate – sacrifices. We owe it to them to proceed with the utmost in forethought, resolve and prudence as we enter the next phase.

THE VISION

A prosperous, stable and democratic Iraq is central to our national interest and to the successful campaign against global terror. With the overthrow of Saddam Hussein we eliminated a major threat to international peace and security. In the last two decades he invaded his neighbors twice, used WMD against his neighbors and his own people, undertook clandestine nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs, and massacred hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens. Ending the Saddam regime was the first step. All of our efforts over the past year have sought to ensure that the new Iraq will be a constructive presence in the region, and that its government be at peace with its neighbors and with its own citizens. When confronted with complex and dangerous challenges as we push

toward that strategic goal, we must recall that our extraordinary efforts in Iraq are not only for the Iraqi people -- but also for our own.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE RULE OF LAW

In partnership with the people of Iraq, the U.S. Mission will support democratization and rule of law, promote economic development and support efforts to restore security and eliminate terrorism.

Visionary and courageous Iraqis developed a timetable and program for getting to democracy in the November 15 agreement, which they subsequently reaffirmed in the Transitional Administrative Law. The Mission will fully support, in cooperation with the United Nations, the international community, and independent Iraqi electoral authorities, all aspects of election preparation. Such support is critical if there are to be elections for a Transitional National Assembly no later than the end of January 2005. In this regard, the expertise of the United Nations will be particularly valuable; it is already helping the Iraqis and the Coalition Provisional Authority establish an independent Electoral Commission, an electoral law and a political parties' law. If confirmed, I will work with the Iraqis to facilitate the United Nations' active engagement as Iraq prepares voter rolls, trains election workers, designates polling stations, and distributes ballots.

In parallel with our support for elections, we will continue to encourage Iraqis as they establish effective governing institutions in Baghdad and the provinces. They will also be supported by a number of provincial branch offices, as well as by Foreign Service Officers working in support of Coalition military units and in cooperation with local communities. At the same time, U.S.-funded education programs will help Iraqis recognize and exercise their rights and responsibilities in a democratic system.

ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

The United States is providing unprecedented funding and technical assistance to help Iraq achieve a level of prosperity commensurate with its natural and human resources and proud history. Working with the Iraqi authorities, who best know the needs of their people, the Mission will oversee the vast array of reconstruction projects underway in Iraq. We will ensure that these projects, financed with taxpayers' funds, serve our policy goals and the priority needs validated by the Iraqis themselves, and we will hold these projects to the highest standards of financial accountability.

We will encourage Iraq's new leaders to choose sound economic policies and to enforce high standards of integrity in public administration in order to stimulate growth and to create jobs.

As the security situation improves and Iraq's oil production capacity increases, we expect that Iraq's share of reconstruction expenses will gradually increase, and that private investment will flow into a country once again rich in opportunity for its people.

SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM

The key to achieving lasting security in Iraq is building and strengthening the capacity of Iraq's security services to deal with both domestic extremists and foreign terrorists. I can think of no more important task. We must do everything within our power to help the government and courageous people of Iraq develop the capacity to defend themselves and maintain the kind of peace and tranquility that will permit their nation to go about its legitimate civilian pursuits. While the theater commander will implement these training responsibilities at this time, I can assure him of my full and complete support.

A robust multinational force presence will be critical, and I will work hard in my current capacity to obtain continued Security Council authorization for such a force.

THE NEXT SIXTY DAYS

There are still unanswered questions about the structure, composition and powers of the Iraqi Interim Government to which I will present my credentials. The process over the next sixty days will have broad implications. In concert with Iraqi political figures and representatives of our Government, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi has been developing plans for the new government, its structure, selection process, and its ultimate composition.

Later today, in my capacity as our Permanent Representative to the United Nations, I plan to attend Ambassador Brahimi's briefing to the Security Council about his proposals, which will be followed by a discussion within the Security Council. I would simply note that over the past two and a half years, I have had the opportunity to work with Ambassador Brahimi on the post-conflict situation in Afghanistan. I have a great deal of respect for his ability to engage disparate, even warring, groups and move them toward productive dialogue, consensus and the

establishment of viable political institutions. We will remain engaged with Ambassador Brahimi in the critical weeks ahead.

The prospect of legitimacy that the United Nations can bring to the process of political reconciliation is a point of crucial interest in both the region and the broader international community. With an expanded United Nations role in the political arena, I believe that it will be easier to generate the international support that the successful rehabilitation of Iraq requires. Secretary General Annan's and Ambassador Brahimi's contributions may well open the door to creative thinking about ways in which the international community, as well as the Coalition, can further contribute to the process of rehabilitating Iraq, both politically and economically.

I want to be clear that a vital United Nations role does not come at the expense of the United States' influence or interests. Our efforts can be well coordinated and complementary; there is ample evidence across a broad range of situations that a strong partnership with the international community, including the United Nations organization is in our strategic interest.

TRANSITION FROM CPA TO EMBASSY

Mr. Chairman, I am impressed with the work of the Interagency Transition Planning Team, led by Ambassador Ricciardone and Lt. General Kicklighter, to structure our U.S. Mission in Iraq so that it will be prepared to pursue these objectives and carry forward the valuable work of the CPA. We anticipate about 1000 direct-hire Americans serving under the Ambassador's authority. Drawing on the resources and skills of all USG agencies present in Iraq, we will represent U.S. interests and offer support to the people and government of Iraq as they renew their country.

Mr. Chairman, I have the greatest respect and admiration for Ambassador Bremer's accomplishments in Iraq under the most difficult circumstances. He is a personal friend as well as a colleague and I value highly his historic contribution to our efforts in Iraq.

However, my role in Iraq will be fundamentally different from that of Ambassador Bremer. Whereas the CPA is the ultimate political authority in Iraq, the Embassy will be in a supportive, as opposed to a commanding role. Also, the Mission will be distinctly American, in contrast to the multinational character of the CPA. Nevertheless, we will continue our close relationship with

our coalition partners, multilateral organizations, and NGOs, who are all vital to the advancement of our common interests.

In regular consultation with the Secretary of State, I will provide policy direction and coordination for all USG activities in Iraq, with the exception of operations by U.S. forces under the area military commander. First among the duties of the Ambassador is to provide a safe environment for our Mission personnel. I recognize that we are deploying civilians to Iraq in a wartime environment - circumstances from which we normally evacuate our people. I will work closely with the U.S. area military commander to ensure the security of our personnel.

CONCLUSION

As momentous as the transition to sovereignty for an Interim Government of Iraq will be, we should bear in mind that we are still in the early phase of Iraq's reconstruction and rehabilitation. The conclusion of the Coalition Provisional Authority on June 30 will mark a vital step towards realizing an independent, democratic and stable Iraq, at peace with its neighbors. I see my mission as working to assist the people and the government of Iraq to achieve these noble goals, while at the same time seeking to ensure that the resources of

the American people, voted by our Congress to support our efforts, are wisely and efficiently utilized.

With our help, the people of Iraq can overcome the trauma of Saddam's brutality and the intimidation of violent extremists seeking to derail the progress they have made so far. But for these policies to succeed, we will need to proceed with resolve, constancy and unity of purpose.

If confirmed, I will do my utmost to serve the Administration and the American people to these ends. I look forward to working closely with the Congress in that effort.

Thank you.