

**Statement by
Ambassador Christopher R. Hill
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 25, 2009**

Chairman Kerry, Senator Lugar, Members of the Committee, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next American Ambassador to Iraq.

I am deeply grateful to the President and to Secretary Clinton for the trust and confidence they have shown in me at this crucial juncture in our relations with Iraq.

Mr. Chairman, on February 27, 2009, the President announced a policy to bring the long conflict in Iraq to an end. The essence of this policy is a responsible drawdown of our military forces in Iraq, combined with a strong political, diplomatic, and civilian effort to preserve hard-fought security gains and to strengthen the foundation for lasting peace and security.

Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to our men and women in uniform and to the thousands of civilians whose sacrifices and accomplishments have brought us to the point where a responsible drawdown is possible. I am honored by the prospect of joining this select group of Americans who have served their country in Iraq with such devotion and courage. I will keep in my mind and heart always the ultimate sacrifice paid by the more than 4000 of our men and women.

If confirmed, my job would be to lead the political, diplomatic, and civilian effort necessary to make our military drawdown a success, with the objective of normalizing our relationship with Iraq based on mutual respect and interests. As the President said, we seek an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant; committed to just,

representative, and accountable governance; and integrated into the global economy; an Iraq that denies haven or support for terrorist or extremist groups, and contributes to regional peace and security. The Iraqis seek the same for their country.

To do this, we will need to advance a strong, cooperative bilateral relationship between the United States and Iraq, as envisioned in the U.S. – Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement, that includes not just security and political cooperation, but also cooperation to assist and resettle refugees and the displaced, educational exchanges, cooperation on trade and investment, telecommunications, energy, and health and environmental protection.

We will aim to build with Iraq the type of normalized relationship we enjoy with other friends and allies around the world. This is a mission that will be replete with challenges, some unique to Iraq, but it is a mission that remains critical to our national interest in the region and beyond.

The Iraqi government and people have made great sacrifices and great strides toward reconciliation, yet much more remains to be done. We can help, but as President Obama has noted, it is ultimately up to the people and government of Iraq to take up the task of securing the gains made and building on them their nation. Iraq's long-term success will – and must – depend on the decisions that only the people and government of Iraq can make. Our responsibility is to support and assist – and, where we can be helpful, act as an honest broker – not to make these decisions on behalf of the Iraqis.

In this context, Mr. Chairman, if I am confirmed, my priorities will include ensuring that we provide the Iraqi government with the support it needs to conduct successful parliamentary elections; achieve a pattern of peaceful and normal political

transition; deepening respect for human rights of all communities, including religious minorities; and strengthen the rule of law.

The majority of Iraqis have embraced the electoral process as the best means for peaceful political change. The provincial elections in January 2009 saw many who felt previously excluded turn out in large numbers to cast ballots. The result was the election of provincial governments that more truly reflect the wishes of the Iraqi people. National parliamentary elections are scheduled for the end of 2009 or early 2010. These elections will be conducted by the Iraqis themselves, but we are prepared to provide valuable support through the work of institutions like the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the United Nations, and other international partners which provide technical assistance, expert advice, and observer missions.

The same is true of economic development. The responsibility for modernizing Iraq's infrastructure, for developing a legal framework that will attract needed foreign investment, for ending corruption – these challenges should be addressed in the first instance by a sovereign Iraq. If confirmed, I will also focus on capacity-building efforts in Baghdad and the provinces that help Iraqi decision-makers efficiently and effectively design and implement policy, and use Iraq's resources in a transparent and fair manner to improve the lives of their people.

The President also called for a robust diplomatic effort to normalize Iraq's relations with its six neighbors and the wider region. My objective, Mr. Chairman, will be to work with the Government of Iraq to help create the diplomatic conditions where Iraq will emerge as a partner of the United States that is committed to regional peace and security.

In all of these efforts, I intend to work closely and in tandem with General Odierno and General Petraeus to ensure that there is unity of effort in all that we do in Iraq. I have worked with some of the best military commanders of this generation on some of our toughest challenges – General Eric Shinseki in the Balkans, General Leon LaPorte in Korea, Admiral Tim Keating at PACOM, to name just a few – and I know that maintaining a strong partnership with our colleagues in uniform will be key to progress in Iraq.

If confirmed as Chief of our Mission in Iraq, I intend to coordinate and focus the contributions being made by all participating civilian agencies of the U.S. government, including USAID, the Department of Justice, the Department of Treasury, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Energy. Coordinating the work of each of these civilian agencies – and ensuring they have the security protection they need to do their jobs effectively – will be essential to the success of the President’s policies.

We must harness the human and other resources available to us and use what Secretary Clinton has termed “smart power” to address priority problems in the most effective way possible. And in this respect I take very seriously my responsibilities to ensure that our taxpayers’ funds are spent wisely and well. Thus, one of the first tasks I would undertake, if confirmed, would be to review our current resources, our personnel levels, and the way we do business to ensure that we are operating at full efficiency and husbanding precious resources, and to move us toward a more normal footprint and posture in Iraq.

The President has charted a course for responsibly ending the war in Iraq and normalizing our mission there.

Mr. Chairman, as I ask the Senate's support to take up that challenge, I am mindful of the lessons that I have learned over the course of my three decades in public service – from working on microcredit as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon in the 1970s; to witnessing the struggle for political freedom in Eastern Europe in the 1980s; to being a part of the negotiating effort to end bloodshed in the Balkans in the 1990s; and most recently to working with like-minded countries to try to get North Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions.

For each of these assignments, I made it a matter of course to dutifully consult the smartest experts and the thickest briefing books. But I have found that the most important preparation was to retain a sense of humility and determination in the face of the complexities that are certain to await me on arrival.

If confirmed, I intend to approach the mission ahead with that same sense of humility and determination.

Thank you. I would be pleased to take your questions.

