

Meridian International Center Speech

October 20, 2009

Washington, DC

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your invitation tonight to address the Meridian International Center. I also want to thank Dr. Sami for being here tonight and for his tremendous efforts as we have worked closely together on this week's Investment Conference. For forty-seven years, the Meridian International Center has been at the forefront of strengthening international understanding through exchanges and collaboration in culture, diplomacy, and commerce. These efforts to build networks and bridge cultures are an important, if not essential, part of America's global engagement, especially in the areas of youth and education.

As Coordinator for Assistance Transition in Iraq since June, my job is to oversee our foreign assistance and assure that it is targeted at common sense projects that promote Iraqi needs and American interests. American assistance in Iraq has often been identified by our military effort but a successful transition in the months ahead will have the Iraqi people indentifying America through a civilian face of economic possibility and development. Our bilateral relationship will evolve during this period of transition as military troop levels decrease. Tonight, I would like to give you a sense of where Iraq is now, where it is going, and how our bilateral engagement is more important than ever in this changing environment.

With the successful withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq's towns and cities, Iraqi Security Forces have stepped up in providing the internal stability that is necessary for future development. Security has improved, allowing economic and governance improvements. After 30 years of isolation, Iraq now has a representative government in the Arab Muslim world. This is evident by the coalition building that is currently happening in Iraq as candidates work toward creating blocs to attract the votes of the Iraqi people in the upcoming national elections.

Iraq also has an opportunity to be a major player in global commerce. Centrally located in the Middle East, it is a country of enormous potential with the planet's third largest oil reserves and a proud agricultural history. Just this week, more than 550 business people from the U.S. and elsewhere are meeting Iraqi counterparts at the U.S.-Iraq Business and Investment Conference to explore opportunities in a wide array of sectors. Even more important than its natural

resources, Iraq has the benefit of deep human resources, and education has always been a valued pillar of Iraqi society.

Our resolve and commitment to a strong and independent Iraq are evident in the progress we have made so far . Two key bilateral agreements bind the U.S. and Iraq together as lasting partners: the Security Agreement and the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA). The Security Agreement recognizes Iraqi Sovereignty and establishes the date of December 2011 for the U.S. military to withdraw from Iraq. The SFA is an agreement of partnership to strengthen and broaden cooperation in mutually agreed upon areas.

As Iraq emerges as a stable state, the SFA will be the basis for our long-term cooperation and friendship. We believe that this agreement will strengthen Iraq's democracy and status in the international community.

The SFA is a symbol of our growing partnership, but I can attest that it is also a concrete avenue of dialogue as I chair two of the Joint Coordination Committees (JCCs) formed under the SFA – Economics and Energy, and Services and IT. We are bilateral partners in health, agriculture, trade, essential services, finance, oil, transportation and telecommunications. We also have JCCs on Law Enforcement and Judicial Cooperation as well as Cultural, Education, and Scientific Cooperation. Through the working groups of these committees, we are creating the building blocks for thriving exchanges of information, programs, and areas of mutual interest.

The military will continue to partner with the Iraqi Security Forces to build their capacity through the end of the Security Agreement on December 31, 2011. The civilian-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs, will also draw down and reorganize as we streamline resources. As troop levels decrease, the transition to civilian-led diplomacy will play a prominent role, including helping reduce Arab-Kurd tensions, improving the capacity for the Iraqi government to better provide essential services to its people, strengthening the capacity of Iraq's police force to ensure long-term stability, and supporting Iraq in its economic and trade development.

In this setting, our foreign assistance priority is also shifting from reconstruction efforts – bricks and mortars - to capacity building. Through USAID’s Tatweer program, we are providing ministries with the tools to strengthen their public administration and human resources. We are supporting rule of law and human rights projects, especially in support of the upcoming election. Anti-corruption projects will continue to address this key area for reform. We have a robust program to help refugees and internally displaced people in their efforts to return to their homes and pick up the pieces. We have funding to help widows and war victims as they struggle to rebuild their lives from the losses they’ve suffered due to violence. In the coming years, we will also re-energize our assistance in the health and education sectors as the improved security environment allows us to reach out more. The U.S. government, the international community, the World Bank, UN, NGOs, and, most importantly, the Government of Iraq itself, will play an increasing role in the future stability and growth of Iraq.

The U.S. wants an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant and an Iraqi government that is just, representative, and accountable. Our goal is for Iraq to contribute to the peace and security of the region. This will not happen overnight and will take resolve and commitment. This is where organizations like the Meridian International Center can play an important role. Your interest, your support and engagement, can help the people of Iraq continue their path to development and becoming a strong bilateral partner. We hope in particular to work with Meridian in the years ahead on the many different exchange programs we will be designing, drawing on your decades of experience and expertise in this field.

Thank you.

Drafted:CREue

Cleared: USAID:Crowley

EXEC:MLavallee

Polmil: O'Connor

Pol:Roebuck

OPA:Wooster

ECON:Carwile

PAS:Frayne