



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

www.pomed.org ♦ 1820 Jefferson Place NW ♦ Washington, DC 20036

Confirmation Hearing:
Christopher Hill, Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Dirksen Senate Building, Room 419
March 25, 2009, 9:30 AM

In his introductory remarks, committee chairman **John Kerry (D-MA)** described several ongoing challenges in Iraq, including settling the Arab-Kurdish dispute over control of Kirkuk, passing oil and gas laws, involving Iraq's neighbors in stabilizing the country, integrating the Sunni militias, helping Iraq's refugees and the internally displaced, and training Iraq's security forces. We must **leverage our withdrawal of troops into "a sustainable political accommodation"** among Iraqis, said Kerry.

Ranking member **Richard Lugar (R-IN)** observed that the Iraqi economy is faltering since oil prices plummeted, and unemployment is high. **Military leaders describe Iraq's progress as "fragile and reversible."** The actions of Iraq's neighbors will crucially shape Iraq's future, so regional diplomacy is essential. He also asserted that Iraq should strengthen its ties to international institutions to lessen the burden on the U.S.

Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) introduced **Christopher Hill**, noting that Mr. Hill has served around the globe, and that his experience in the Balkans in the 1990s provided experience managing ethnic/religious conflicts and demonstrated his disposition to work closely with the military.

Hill began by describing the administration's Iraq policy as "a responsible drawdown of our military forces in Iraq, combined with a strong political, diplomatic, and civilian effort to preserve hard-fought security gains." Ultimately the Iraqis must help themselves, but the U.S. has a role to play in supporting the upcoming parliamentary elections; promoting peaceful transfers of power, human rights, and the rule of law; and cooperating with Baghdad on other issues including refugees, educational exchanges, trade, health, and the environment. Another priority will be to coordinate the work of U.S. civilian agencies in Iraq and ensure their security is protected. **President Obama** has also called for robust diplomacy between Iraq and its neighbors.

Sen. Kerry asked Mr. Hill what lessons could be applied to Iraq from his time serving as a diplomat in the Balkans. Hill noted that he saw some of the same problems in the Balkans as in Iraq, such as communal tensions and border disputes. He learned that "there's no macro approach" to solving these problems: they must be addressed on a local basis. To do **this requires accountable institutions, so the U.S. will continue to develop the capacity of Iraqi ministries.** His experience arranging the six-party negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program would also be valuable, because Iraq's neighbors must be persuaded to respect Iraq's sovereignty. Supporting internal security will also be vital, along with solving tensions over Kirkuk, promoting economic development, and reducing corruption. Hill also said that the **recent local elections, marked by high turnout and Sunni participation, signaled Iraqis' growing faith in democracy.** (And the parliamentary elections must also be successful in the eyes of Iraqis.) But he cautioned that it is possible that violence could flare up again in Iraq.

Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN) asked how the U.S. troop withdrawal would affect the efforts Hill had outlined. As the U.S. reduces its troop presence, U.S. forces will continue to train the Iraqi military and police, and gradually hand over responsibility for security to them. We will lose some of the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs); Hill credited the PRTs with much of Iraq's recent progress. Corker expressed his hope that Iraq would begin paying for more of the reconstruction effort.

Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI) praised the administration's withdrawal plan as "a clear shift from a predominantly military presence to a predominantly civilian one," but he felt that the residual forces that will be maintained until 2012 are too large and send the wrong signal to Iraqis. Hill responded that the president wants to be prepared to handle any "bumps in the road" that may arise as we withdraw our troops. After combat forces leave Iraq by August 2010, the roughly 35,000 troops left over will play a role that is mainly advisory. But the plan may have to be adjusted if circumstances in Iraq change. **Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA)** asked Hill directly, "Is it the position of the administration that all forces will be out by the end of 2011?" Hill said that was his understanding.

Feingold also asked about reports of rising Kurdish nationalism. In Hill's view, the conflicts over internal borders in the Kurdish provinces were "old fashioned land disputes" similar to those he had dealt with in the Balkans and could be addressed with help from the UN. Outsiders can't impose a solution, but can facilitate negotiations among Iraqis. The oil and gas laws that are eventually passed will speak volumes about the future of power sharing in Iraq.

Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) mentioned that the previous administration had bought off the "awakening councils," which include many former Sunni militants, and asked Hill what would happen when the U.S. eventually stopped funding them. Hill said that the Iraqi government is taking over these payments and that in the long-run, the awakening forces should be incorporated into the Iraqi armed forces. Dodd also asked about the "strategic plans" of Iraq's neighbors, and Hill noted that there is a growing trend in the region to normalize relations with the Iraqi government. But Iran remains a threat to Iraq, and U.S. policy toward Iran is currently under review.

Robert Menendez (D-NJ) raised concerns about high-level corruption in the Iraqi government and the \$3-4 billion in U.S. reconstruction funds that were never accounted for. When Hill confirmed that U.S. aid to Iraq would continue after the removal of combat forces, Menendez asked how the U.S. can reduce corruption. According to Hill, the key is to strengthen Iraq's institutions, and the U.S. is assisting Iraq in building capacity for monitoring of spending. Asked by Menendez whether the U.S. military should be involved in disbursing micro-loans, Hill said this should be a civilian activity, although he allowed that there could be exceptions in some cases.

Lugar asked Hill about the allegations made by **Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS)** that, as the U.S. representative to the six-party talks on North Korea, Hill had broken his promise to press Kim Jong-Il's regime on human rights issues. Hill said he shared Brownback's concerns about the regime's human rights violations. He explained that he had promised to bring up human rights when the U.S. and North Korea began talks on normalizing diplomatic relations. However, those talks were only set to take place once Korea implemented adequate mechanisms to verify that it had ended its nuclear weapons program. Since those conditions have not yet been met, the broader negotiations (including on human rights) did not take place while Hill was serving in that position. Sen. Webb later noted that he also shared Sen. Brownback's concerns about human rights in North Korea.