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“Nomination”

The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

419 Dirksen Senate Office Building

July 20, 2010, 2:30 P.M. - 4:00 P.M

The **U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations** held a hearing yesterday to consider nominees for ambassadorial positions in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Turkey. Many of the questions posed by the Committee focused on democratization, human rights, governance, and institution building. The Committee—headed by [Chairman Sen. John Kerry](#) (D-MA) and ranking [Committee member Sen. Richard G. Lugar](#) (R-IN)—requested the testimony of four nominees. The first panel consisted of [James Franklin Jeffrey](#), to be Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq, while the second panel included [Maura Connelly](#), to be Ambassador to the Republic of Lebanon; [Gerald M. Feierstein](#), to be Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen; [The Honorable Francis Joseph Ricciardone Jr.](#), to be Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey.

Sen. Kerry opened with comments on Iraq, noting that U.S. civilian forces will increasingly be responsible for taking on tasks previously handled by American troops. Commenting on the political situation, he stated, **“Four months after elections, Iraq still does not have a government. It’s not clear whether a resolution is days, weeks, or months away, but it is clear that this political moment in Iraq demands that we put a new ambassador in place quickly,”** expressing the Committee’s intention to confirm Jeffrey before adjourning for the August recess. He argued that “the ongoing deadlock undercuts the general population’s faith in their leaders” and “distracts Iraqi political leaders from the crucial issues that will determine the nature of the Iraqi state.” Noting that “core issues remain unresolved, from federalism to constitutional review, to the disposition of Iraq’s oil wealth,” Kerry concluded that **“beneath all of these issues lies one fundamental question: Are Iraq’s political leaders committed to consolidate their democracy and resolve their differences peacefully,”** adding that **“Iraqi leaders must decide what kind of country they want to create.”**

Turning to Turkey, Kerry **emphasized Turkey’s “dynamic economy [and] vibrant civil society in a region where, quite frankly, those assets are rare.”** He observed that the country has begun asserting its interests in the Middle East and remarked on the importance of the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Regarding Lebanon, Kerry pointed to continuing political and security problems due to external interference and the role of Hezbollah, advocating for active regional diplomacy to address these issues. Kerry also focused on the increasing terrorist threat in Yemen, arguing that security, economic, and humanitarian concerns contribute to the problem.

Sen. Lugar’s opening remarks **also pointed to the Iraqi parliamentary deadlock, suggesting that an agreement on the prime ministerial position may not be reached for several months.** Stating that American involvement will “remain robust” despite the military drawdown and will include more

than 5,000 diplomats and civilian advisors “working with civil society and the Iraqi government,” Lugar said that the U.S. must “flesh out” how all pieces of this “ambitious” project will fit together. He called Turkey a “vital partner for the United States, despite recent disagreements”; characterized Hezbollah as a threat to Lebanese interests and to peace in the region; and asked for details regarding U.S. programs and initiatives in Yemen, given that the country faces “so many basic problems.”

James Jeffrey indicated that the U.S. remains “committed to a long-term relationship with our partner Iraq” as the American approach shifts from a military lead to an all-of-government approach. **Jeffrey specifically mentioned the administration’s concern about the “devastating violence” that Christian minorities in Iraq have suffered.**

Sen. Casey (D-PA) remarked that the levels of violence in Iraq have decreased drastically since 2006 and 2007, and asked for Jeffrey’s thoughts on keeping the level of violence down. He also noted that **Ambassador Ryan Crocker has described the “broader objectives in Iraq” as achieving “sustainable stability,”** and questioning what metrics could be used to measure progress on that front.

Jeffrey called the 90% drop in levels of violence since 2006-7 “extraordinary,” and argued that improved security can be maintained and will provide the “framework” for progress on the political and economic fronts. He affirmed that **President Obama envisions “an Iraq that is stable, self-reliant, is sovereign, with a government that is just, that is accountable, and is representative,” and called these the administration’s “top line goals.”** Jeffrey highlighted political reconciliation between factions; economic development; and the delivery of services such as water, electricity, health, and education, as metrics for measuring success, **arguing that “all of these things are showing positive indicators,” particularly security and “the democratic system.”** Nevertheless, Jeffrey acknowledged that “we don’t know at this point how sustainable” this progress will be.

Sen. Kaufman (D-DE) asked **what the U.S. is doing to integrate the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi government.** He also inquired about the role of Iraq’s neighbors; requested Jeffrey’s thoughts on the formation of the Iraqi government; and asked for more details regarding U.S. plans to ramp up civilian efforts in Iraq over the next 1-2 years. Kaufman concluded his remarks with a request for clarification on the U.S.’s long-term commitment to Iraq.

Jeffrey noted that many of the Iraqis involved in the Sons of Iraq have been integrated into the security apparatus and other areas of government, characterizing continued integration as “very important.” On Iraq’s neighbors, Jeffrey pointed to good relations between Turkey and the Iraqi government. He expressed caution over Iranian attempts to “exert some indirect influence on Iraq by keeping a weak Shi’a government that’s subject to Iranian influence on the political military and economic fields,” and called Syria’s relationship with Iraq “complicated,” encompassing issues of foreign fighters in Iraq and Iraqi refugees in Syria. **Jeffrey also pointed to the support of ambassadors from five countries in the Sunni Arab world— Egypt, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Jordan –as well as seven or eight additional Arab embassies on the ground.** He commended international institutions such as the UN for their “heroic” work on the Iraqi elections and other issues.

On Iraqi government formation, Jeffrey stated, **“We are not engaged in any involvement in this, this is an Iraqi responsibility, but we are concerned that it do move forward as quickly as possible. In addition, we want to see a government that is inclusive... but also one that is competent and one that can partner with us. We are concerned about the delays but we do point out that the caretaker government has done a pretty good job.”** Jeffrey added that **the Iraqis are working out an**

“encouraging political process” that, though frustrating, “does show that real politics is underway and that people are engaging.” Addressing the ramp up of U.S. civilian presence, Jeffrey detailed plans for five locations outside of Baghdad—including Basra, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Bacouba – two consulates, and three embassy branch offices, replacing the 24 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) currently in Iraq and carrying out **“very robust political reporting, economic and assistance activities, rule of law as well, [and] human rights monitoring.”** He emphasized that the Department of State will also take over police training programs from the military. Noting that these initiatives would be temporary in nature, with three of the branch programs slotted to close in 3-5 years, **Jeffrey nevertheless characterized the depth and breadth of the embassy mission in Iraq as a vast endeavor that “has not been seen before” elsewhere.** He argued that the U.S. commitment to Iraq “has been sealed in blood and treasure” and that the U.S. is “not going to walk away from” its obligations there.

Sen. Casey asked about **Moqtada al-Sadr’s role in the Iraqi government formation, noting that Sadr’s followers won 39 seats in the parliamentary elections.** Jeffrey called the Sadr bloc “significant,” noting that Sadr has consistently received 10-11% of the vote in national elections. Nevertheless, he expressed the administration’s hope **“that while we disagree with many of [Sadr’s] views, including his views about us, that he can become integrated into the political system fully,”** arguing that “We’ll deal with [his constituents] as long as they’re in the political system.”

Sen. Kerry asked about the level of Iranian influence and Iran’s goals in Iraq. He then focused on the political impasse in Iraq, asking how long it might continue and how the U.S. could address the situation. Kerry posed a critical question to Jeffrey: **“Is there any way in which you might judge that Prime Minister Maliki is simply not going to work in good faith to try to put together a legitimate government** here, that he will just hang on and hang on.... [and] we sort of crumble out of the democracy we’ve created into another strong man situation?”

Jeffrey suggested that Iran is seeking a politically weak Iraq, with a major role for Shi’a in government and influence over Iraqi parties and the political system. Stating that “the Iraqi people are patriotic Iraqis, they don’t want anybody—not us, not the neighbors – telling them how to run their affairs,” Jeffrey advised a strong political system, economic development, and regional and international relationships as the “best way to resist” Iranian influence in Iraq. On government formation, he noted that **under the Iraqi constitution, the current impasse could last indefinitely; however, he predicted that after four to five months of stalemate, public pressure and the ruling out of options may produce movement** on the issue. Jeffrey cautioned against “any direct involvement by outside actors” in the process. Regarding Maliki, he responded, “I’ve seen nothing that indicates” Maliki would refuse to step down as prime minister if necessary, arguing that the Jafri government provided a good precedent for this situation and adding, “We have no reason to question the basic legitimacy of these folks at this time.”

Sen. Feingold (D-) focused on the **State Department human rights report on Iraq, which found that “as in previous years, reports of abuse at the point of arrest and during the investigation period, particularly by the Minister of Interior’s federal police and Minister of Defense’s battalion-level forces, continued to be common.”** Feingold asked Jeffrey, “How will you work with the relevant Iraqi and U.S. entities to facilitate improvements in human rights in Iraq which according to the state dept report are far below adequate?”

Jeffrey replied that the administration is seeking to use police training effort to “get at” this pattern of abuse, stating, “Our hope is that we can see this on a declining slope. It’s something I’ll look at very carefully if I’m confirmed.” At the same time, he noted that “Iraq is coming out of a horrific conflict and out of 30 years of dictatorship and almost constant war,” arguing that **“it’s going to take some time for Iraq, even with a democratic government and democratic institutions, to move into an environment” of full respect for human rights.** He also mentioned that minority communities in Iraq represent a “great concern,” and that the U.S. is “putting a special effort” into minority issues.

Sen. Shaheen pointed to the “fragility of the current situation,” arguing that **“those who would promote instability in the country love the vacuum that now exists without a government having been formed yet.”** She asked about how to ensure progress in forming the Iraqi government.

Jeffrey observed that as opposed to in 2005 and 2006, the current caretaker government has performed well and maintained stability in the country, proposing that “the Iraqis are learning to deal with a situation that we see from time even in parliamentary democracies in Europe as well.” He elaborated that **“the whole process of forming a government, to some degree, is the job of government in Iraq”** and emphasized that it is critical at this stage of Iraq’s development that the government **“be as inclusive as possible”** to curb sectarianism. He pointed to the need for the new government, once formed, to address a number of issues, among them the rule of law and the complex legal system.

Maura Connelly opened for the second panel, highlighting the Lebanese elections. She stated, **“With the June 2009 parliamentary elections, the Lebanese people chose a leadership that seeks to strengthen the Lebanese state,”** adding that “U.S. assistance to Lebanon over the past 5 years has been transparently directed to supporting the aspirations of those Lebanese leaders who want to build a strong Lebanon and to extend the authority of the state throughout the territory.”

Gerald Feierstein commented that “promoting security, stability, and development in Yemen... will be my highest priorities,” arguing that **“over the long term, the antidote for extremism will be more than security operations. It will rely on the development of credible and transparent national institutions** that can deliver the political, economic, and social progress that people seek.” In that light, he highlighted the “critical role” of the U.S. in supporting “necessary and increasingly robust development and humanitarian assistance programs” and in maintaining “sound working relations with the government of Yemen, civil society, and political and business leaders to build the foundations of a strong, secure, and democratic Yemen.”

Francis Ricciardone observed “Turkey’s continuing transformation into a more democratic, more open and more economically vibrant, modern state.” He emphasized Turkey’s key role as a U.S. ally as well as a “secular, democratic state that respects the rule of law.” He proposed that **“strengthening democracy, human rights, and the rule of law”** is **“essential and integral”** to efforts to promote regional stability.

Sen. Casey expressed his concern over the influence & rearming of Hezbollah. He also mentioned that Lebanese officials’ gratitude for the U.S.’s investment of hundreds of millions of dollars to support police training, government security forces, and other programs. **Connolly** emphasized the philosophical difference between the goals of U.S. allies in Lebanon and the sociopolitical vision offered by Hezbollah, and noted the need for the central Lebanese government to extend its authority.

Sen. Lugar expressed concern over the apparently “dysfunctional government” in Yemen, adding that **the U.S. embassy team faces the challenge of being unable to travel outside of the capital to monitor key projects on the ground.** **Feierstein** outlined two pillars to the approach of the U.S. and the “friends of Yemen”: first, helping the Yemeni government and security forces to control all of their territory; and second, “building up the economic, social and political structures inside of Yemen so that the people of Yemen have the strength and the confidence that they need in order to resist the extremist message and to align themselves with the government.” He cautioned that completing these tasks will take a number of years.

Sen. Feingold indicated his **concern over actions taken by the Turkish government that threaten the 2000-year-old Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul**, asking what **Ricciardone** would do as ambassador to address this problem. **Ricciardone** indicated that he would visit with the Ecumenical Patriarch, “make representations at the highest levels of the Turkish government, [and] work with the officials and with civil society” on this issue, “as on all other human rights issues.” He stated that he would also **engage with other religious minorities in Turkey and “continue to report honestly on the state of that issue and other religious freedom issues.”**

Feingold then asked how the U.S. could support a political solution to the Houthi rebellion in Yemen. **Feierstein** responded that **“over the last several days, there has been some progress in resolving some of the political disputes about the upcoming parliamentary elections next year,”** suggesting that Houthis appear interested in nonviolent negotiations toward a political resolution.

Turning to Lebanon, Feingold asked Connelly for her perception of the changing relationship between Syria and Lebanon. **Connelly** said that though the Obama administration is pursuing engagement with Syria, this new approach will not undermine U.S. commitment to an independent and sovereign Lebanon.

Sen. Casey asked **Feierstein** to explain the development challenges underlying security problems in Yemen. **Feierstein** highlighted water scarcity, decreasing oil resources, high illiteracy rates, social demographics that include a large youth population, and **“a significant challenge in terms of promoting female development, education, equal rights for women in Yemeni society.”**

Casey raised again the issue of religious minority rights in Turkey; **Ricciardone** confirmed the need for progress on this issue, arguing that **“to be in the front rank of countries in diplomacy— in cultural, political, and diplomatic influence—one has to have a strong democracy, the rule of law, protections of the citizens’ freedoms, and especially religious freedom. Turkey has those aspirations and ambitions, it is good that they have them, and if they wish to realize them, they’re going to have to live by them.”**

Sen. Lugar asked if a problem of “political paralysis” is emerging in Lebanon as the “gains of the March 14 coalition have eroded.” He also asked how assertive the U.S. should be in pushing for a “much more independent Lebanon that manages its affairs” without undue Hezbollah interference, and inquired if Connelly would find having a U.S. ambassador in Syria helpful. **Connelly** acknowledged that progress on initiatives in Lebanon such as the National Dialogue has come more slowly than the administration would like, but said that the Lebanese government is not paralyzed. **She argued that the administration is “very active... in Lebanon on trying to support the elected government” vis-à-vis Hezbollah, and stated that “it would be enormously useful to have a counterpart in Damascus.”**

Sen. Menendez expressed his concern over recent developments in Turkey, including its vote on UN sanctions against Iran, its behavior toward the state of Israel following the flotilla incident, and its position on Cyprus. He specifically **asked how Ricciardone would address the “critical issue” of the Armenian genocide, proposing that some degree of Turkish “acknowledgement” must occur** in order to move forward on reconciliation.

Ricciardone noted that the **U.S. has always viewed Turkey as “an example for other states in the region, as a Muslim-majority state that was a secular democracy, an imperfect democracy, but one struggling toward it and one that has made great strides,”** and that greater study is needed of how Turkey is changing. He said that the administration is seeking a normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, which must include a “frank, full and just acknowledgement of the history that those two peoples share,” adding that “President Obama has spoken very forcefully about the events of 1915 as one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century.”

Sen. Casey observed that **the administration is seeking \$106.6 million in aid for Yemen for FY11, well above the \$67 million requested in FY10,** and the \$42 million in FY09. He noted that the Department of Defense also provided around \$150 million to Yemen in FY10, asking how the U.S. can measure the effectiveness of this spending.

Feierstein explained that “it is the administration’s policy to try to maintain a balance between the security assistance levels and the economic assistance levels,” as part of **a strategy that places equal emphasis on “putting into place the programs and the projects that are going to develop [the Yemeni] economy, develop their social infrastructure, and secure the democratization and political process for the future.”** He indicated that “accountability & oversight are a challenge, especially on the economic side,” saying that “we are less confident that we can assure the Congress in particular that this money is being well-spent.” Feierstein closed with the assessment that will continue to face the challenge of attempting to “right-size” funding and assistance programs, stating “You want to put in enough money in order to accomplish the objectives that you are trying to achieve, and yet we’ve also seen in other contexts... that **too much money can bring its own set of problems. It can breed additional corruption. It can undermine some of the reform efforts that you’re trying to make.**”