

Statement of Ronald L. Schlicher
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, it is my honor today to report to you today on where we stand in the State Department in terms of being prepared for the upcoming transition to Iraqi sovereignty on June 30, and in preparing to stand up our new Mission in Baghdad in a way that helps both us and the Iraqis meet the challenges that lie ahead. Let me thank you in advance for the interest and support you and the Congress as a whole have afforded to our personnel, both military and civilian, on the ground in Iraq.

The State Department is also organizing itself to be better able to meet the challenge of transitioning to lead agency in managing and representing US interests to a sovereign Iraqi government. Our first Ambassador to the new Iraq, John D. Negroponte, is eminently well prepared for the challenges at hand as one of the most capable and seasoned diplomats our nation has to offer. He is assisted by his Deputy Chief of Mission, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, who was serving as our Ambassador in Albania before he answered the call to serve in Iraq. Ambassador Jeffrey is already on the ground in Baghdad leading an advance team to smooth the transition. Ambassador Negroponte and Ambassador Jeffrey have put together a superb, very senior new country team that collectively features an impressive mixture of regional experience, management skills, and technical expertise. This management team will supervise a large Mission totaling up to 1000 permanent American staff, as well as around 500 locally-employed staff. Our security upgrades for our temporary chancery are proceeding on schedule and it will be ready by July 1. We have also chosen a site for a permanent Chancery and would like to come to agreement with the Iraqi government on the way forward on this project as soon as possible.

In preparing for the transition, there has been a remarkable effort undertaken by Ambassador Frank Ricciardone and General Mick Kicklighter, who led a combined team to work out how State and DoD will work together in the new post-June 30 context. Thanks to their work, the two agencies have finalized agreements between each other on respective roles, missions, resources, responsibilities and authorities so that they will complement and support each other.

Inside the State Department, we are also in the process of organizing ourselves to better handle the challenges posed. Inside the near East Bureau, we are creating an operation known as "NEA/I," – "I" for Iraq – which will entail my office as Coordinator, a Deputy, a political office, an economic office, a public diplomacy office, a political-military office and an office of a Coordinator for Iraq Reconstruction headed by Ambassador Robin Raphel. This team in Washington will be responsible for close coordination on a constant basis with Ambassador Negroponte's team in Baghdad and with the interagency process here.

The new U.S. team in Baghdad will work in partnership with the new sovereign Iraqi Interim Government to achieve our shared goals on achieving security and stability, improving the delivery of services and economic opportunity, and in ushering in Iraq's first democratic elections no later than January 2005. The UN will also remain an important partner in the effort to organize the elections.

As the Iraqis start exercising their sovereign rights, we will find ourselves in a more standard situation as far as the manner of conducting bilateral business goes. On the diplomatic side of the house we will be doing business as a country team, which is organized in a manner that achieves a comprehensive approach to a given issue by airing issues and shaping responses by considering each interested agency's or party's prism on the issue. This integrated approach to the pursuit of our goals is especially vital in Iraq, of course, given the enormity of the tasks at hand on both the security and reconstruction and democracy sides.

During the coming period, as we work with the Interim government and the UN to assure free and fair elections, it will be very important that we keep a clear focus on what average Iraqis and the political class are doing, saying, and thinking about the momentous events through which they are passing. In this regard, the new country team will be able to build on the contacts and outreach established by CPA and Ambassador Bremer's team over the last 14 months -- this task was a very difficult one after a decade and half's absence from the country, but CPA has made great strides in this regard in its time in Baghdad. Our Mission will also be aided greatly by the presence outside Baghdad of regional centers in Mosul, Kirkuk, Basra, and Hillah, and by the embedding of FSO's with division-level military commands in the field. This range of assets should help Ambassador Negroponte and our military commanders keep well abreast of the local context in which they are operating.

Thus, with the establishment of a strong new Mission, with clear ideas about how we will coordinate the achievement of our policy and security goals, and with the establishment of the security partnership with the IIG described by General Sharp, we are well-placed in institutional terms to meet the challenges before us.

We are also hopeful that the preparations that the United States and Coalition countries have made over the course of more than a year will help assure that the Iraqis are ready to resume sovereignty. Our efforts have been from the ground up and from the top down. First, we have provided the training, advice, equipment, and facilities to help establish and strengthen local, regional, and national governing institutions. As of our last count, there are 16 governorate councils, 90 district councils, 194 city councils, and 445 neighborhood councils. At the national level, we have already turned over 16 (check number) ministries to direct Iraqi control and the rest will be transferred over in the two weeks leading up to June 30. We will continue to offer to the Iraqis liaison officers to help provide the technical expertise which they judge they need to run their ministries in the most effective manner possible. We also supported the Iraqis as they drafted and adopted clearly defined principles and targets in the Transitional Administrative Law, which will be in effect as of July 1 and will stay in effect until a constitutionally-based

elected government takes office. On June 1, the former Iraqi Governing Council adopted with our full support the Annex to the TAL that reflected the results of extensive conversations by UN Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi with Iraqis from across Iraq's diverse society.

The Iraqi Interim Government that will assume full sovereign authority on June 30 is in place. It is led by President Ghazi al-Yawer and a strong Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. We believe that the Iraqi Interim Government is particularly notable for its competence, experience, and diversity -- politically, professionally, and geographically. Nearly two-thirds of the cabinet ministers have doctorates, and a preponderance of ministers have noted served previously as ministers or members of the former Governing Council.

It is our impression that, in spite of the ongoing terrorist attacks on Iraqi civil servants and Coalition targets, the overall initial reception by the Iraqi public to the new government has been very positive. Similarly, reception to the new Interim Government in the region and the international community has been very positive. The new, unanimously adopted UNSCR 1456 also provides strong international endorsement of Iraq's re-acquisition of sovereignty, of a robust and comprehensive security partnership between the MNF and IIG, and of Iraq's reconstruction and economic development. We will work with the Iraqi Interim Government to actively seek out particular ways in which the international community can support each of these goals. We are encouraged that the interim government, despite the enormous challenges it still faces, starts its tenure with a significant degree of support.

As Iraqis find renewed pride in their sovereignty and move toward free and fair democratic elections scheduled for no later than next January, there will also be other means by which they can be confident that they are re-asserting control over their sovereign affairs. The TAL Annex provides for a National Council to be selected at an Iraq-organized national conference to be held in Baghdad next month. PM Allawi and his government will be able to draw on the wisdom and advice of this Council. In addition to its advisory function, it will be a forum to promote national dialogue and consensus, and will have the authority to oversee the implementation of laws, and to veto executive orders by a two-thirds majority.

Mr. Chairman, as you can see, the State Department is working hard with all our interagency colleagues, with our Coalition partners, with CPA, the UN and the Iraqi people to carry out a smooth transition which will enable the new Mission to carry out the direction provided by President Bush. On May 24, he laid out five steps that we must accomplish to consolidate freedom and stability in Iraq: Those steps are

First, handing over authority to a sovereign Iraqi government.

Second, helping establish security.

Third, continuing to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure.

Fourth, encouraging international support.

And fifth, moving toward free national elections.

Through the measures we have put in place and others as needed, we will pursue these goals laid out by the President with vigor and will overcome the challenges posed by an uncertain security environment, by ongoing reconstruction efforts, and by a political process that is still new to a people traumatized by an evil system which ruled for decades. In this period, we will also look to you for the support that Congress has offered in helping our nation, the Coalition, and the Iraqi people in achieving our profoundly important goals in Iraq.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee today on these important topics.