

The Honorable Thomas Pickering-October 24, 2006

“India: What Americans Should Know About This Emerging Power”

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, one of America's most distinguished and experienced diplomats, addressed the Global Business Luncheon on October 24 about India's increasing importance as a global economic and political power. That same evening, he addressed a capacity audience at the World Affairs Council/UNF Global Issues Evening regarding US policy options toward Iran and Iraq.

Speaking on India, Pickering emphasized the important economic and political reforms underway in that country, the emergence of India as a nuclear power, and the evolving nature of US-India relations. India is continuing economic reforms begun in the early '90's, when current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was Minister of Finance, and is moving toward a mixed economy with less government control, more private-sector participation and a greater market orientation. With Indian universities graduating more than 100,000 engineers annually, substantial investment in R&D, and the spread of IT technology centers to many parts of the country, India is poised to maintain 8 to 9 percent annual economic growth for the foreseeable future.

Politically, the Congress Party's dominance is under threat from the BJP (Hindu) and other narrower political parties. Governance through the formation of coalitions is now the hallmark of Indian politics, but these are difficult to organize and manage, and the political scene is much more vibrant. India's 1974 nuclear test put it at odds with the US for many years, but policies of engagement begun in the Clinton Administration have been continued by President Bush, and could lead eventually to a more effective global regime for addressing the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation.

“Iran, Iraq and the U.S.: High Stakes Relationships”

Pickering stressed the need for diplomatic rather than military interventions in respect to both Iran and Iraq. The US approach to Iran, he said, should include the formation of a global mechanism that guarantees access to nuclear fuel but that restricts nuclear enrichment and recovery to the major nuclear powers. At the same time, the US must negotiate with Iran a resolution of our bi-lateral issues, must abandon the notion of regime change and must offer to other nations in the region protection against nuclear threat.

According to Pickering, a successful resolution of the Iraq situation will require not only strengthening of Iraqi police and military forces, but also a political formula that promotes reconciliation and establishes a federal system that assures an equitable sharing of resource revenues among the various components of Iraqi society. Pickering argued that the US approach at this point should be toward greater internationalization of the Iraqi issue. He suggested the establishment of a Contact Group, initially comprising the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Japan, and expanding as appropriate to include Iraq's neighbors, who have strong interest in seeing a stable Iraq on their borders.

-Tom Brennan

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