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**REMARKS**

**Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton,**  
**Vice President Joe Biden,**  
**Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell,**  
**Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke**

**January 22, 2009**  
**Benjamin Franklin Room**  
**Washington, D.C.**

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Thank you. Thank you very much, and welcome to the State Department. Please be seated.

We are delighted to be joined this afternoon by President Obama and Vice President Biden for this very important announcement. But it is also absolutely a delight to have the President and the Vice President here with us today. It is an indication of the President's commitment to a foreign policy that protects our national security and advances our interests and is in keeping with our values. So we, Mr. President, take great heart from the confidence that you have placed in us.

Today, we start the hard work to restore our standing and enable our country to meet the vexing new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also to seize the opportunities that await us. The President is committed to making diplomacy and development the partners in our foreign policy along with defense, and we must be smarter about how we exercise our power. But as I said this morning upon entering the building, the heart of smart power--are smart people. And Mr. President, we have them in abundance here in the State Department, USAID, and our related agencies.

Today, you will see an example of the kind of robust diplomacy that the President intends to pursue and that I am honored to help him fulfill. Nowhere is there a need for a vigorous diplomatic approach more apparent than in the two regions that epitomize the nuance and complexity of our interconnected world. Many of you in this building, many of your Foreign Service and Civil Service and Foreign National colleagues have been engaged on behalf of issues related to the Middle East and to Afghanistan and Pakistan for years, sometimes, as we know, at great peril and personal sacrifice. That work has been invaluable, and it will continue to be the underpinning of everything our government does to achieve peace and stability in these regions.

At the same time, we know that anything short of relentless diplomatic efforts will fail to produce a lasting, sustainable peace in either place. That is why the President and I have decided to name a Special Envoy for Middle East Peace and a Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Given the magnitude of the issues confronting us, we will bolster the excellent work that is done daily here, as well as in our embassies and outposts around the world, and particularly in these two regions, by an intensive push undertaken through the efforts of these two seasoned diplomats.

Mr. President, by coming here to the State Department, and through your announcement today of these two positions, you are, through word and deed, sending a loud and clear signal that diplomacy is a top priority of your presidency, and that our nation is once again capable of demonstrating global leadership in pursuit of progress and peace.

We are honored to have you join us on only the second day in office. We are grateful to you for highlighting these urgent issues and the collaboration needed to address two of the biggest foreign policy challenges of our time. I know that everyone here at State and in our various embassies and consulates and other outposts throughout the world look forward to working closely with these two exceptional public servants, as we strive to protect and advance America's interests and find a path to peace and greater harmony in these vital areas of the world.

I am pleased now to introduce someone who is no stranger to this Department, who has been a friend and partner, as a Senator, as the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and now as our Vice President. There are few people who have been so devoted to promoting diplomacy and development as our guest, Vice President Joe Biden. (Applause.)

**VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN:** Thank you very much. Madame Secretary, let me begin by saying congratulations. It was a bright day for the whole Department and the Foreign Service when you walked through that door. And so, congratulations to you.

Mr. President, your choice of our colleague, Senator Clinton, is absolutely the right person, in my view, at the right moment in American history.

We've come here today to the State Department to send a very clear message, a clear message at home as well as abroad, that we are going to reinvigorate America's commitment to diplomacy. This effort will be led by Secretary Clinton. I believe, and as I know you do, Mr. President, because you chose her, that she has the knowledge, the skill, the experience, as well as that sort of intangible commodity of having personal relationships with many of these world leaders, which makes her uniquely – in my view, uniquely qualified to put diplomacy back in the forefront of America's foreign policy.

For too long, we've put the bulk of the burden, in my view, on our military. That's a view not only shared by me, but by your Secretary of Defense as well. And our military is absolutely – to

state the obvious, absolutely necessary, but not sufficient. Not sufficient to secure the interests of this great nation.

In a moment, Mr. President, you're going to announce two new powerful weapons in our – or I mean, I guess the Secretary is going to announce two very powerful weapons in our diplomatic arsenal. They have faced and helped resolve equally challenging issues to the ones they face today in their – throughout their careers, from the Balkans to Northern Ireland. Both – both are outstanding public servants and both are very, with all full disclosure, Mr. President, very old and close and friends.

Mr. President, if you'll permit me, I'd like to thank them. I'd like to thank them for their willingness to come back into government to take on two of the most vexing international dilemmas that we face and require their incredible capacity. And so I compliment the Secretary on her recommendations and your choices, and I look forward to--with following you, Mr. President, to reinvigorate diplomacy in the world. It is the key, ultimately, to our security.

I thank you. (Applause)

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** The President and I feel very grateful for the willingness of both of these extraordinary Americans to serve. And it is also fitting to thank their families. Both Mrs. Mitchell--Heather--and Kati, Richard Holbrooke's wife are here, along with other family members. These are very difficult assignments. They are disruptive of settled and successful lives. And we thank them for taking on these responsibilities.

It's my great honor to introduce the man who the President and I have asked to be the Special Envoy for Middle East Peace. He will lead our efforts to reinvigorate the process for achieving peace between Israel and its neighbors. He will help us to develop an integrated strategy that defends the security of Israel, works to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will result in two states living side by side in peace and security, and to achieve further agreements to promote peace and security between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Senator Mitchell will also work to support the objectives that the President and I believe are critical and pressing in Gaza, to develop a program for humanitarian aid and eventual reconstruction, working with the Palestinian Authority and Israel on behalf of those objectives.

It is a great personal pleasure to introduce George Mitchell, a man who is well known inside this Department and across Washington and America, who has been willing to accept this important assignment. (Applause.)

**SENATOR MITCHELL:** Mr. President, Madame Secretary, I am grateful to you for your kind words and for the confidence that you show in me and in Ambassador Holbrooke. It's a great honor for me to be able to serve our country again, and especially to do so with my friend and distinguished colleague, Richard Holbrooke.

I don't underestimate the difficulty of this assignment. The situation in the Middle East is volatile, complex, and dangerous. But the President and the Secretary of State have made it clear that danger and difficulty cannot cause the United States to turn away. To the contrary, they recognize and have said that peace and stability in the Middle East are in our national interest. They are, of course, also in the interest of Israelis and Palestinians, of others in the region, and people throughout the world.

The Secretary mentioned Northern Ireland. There, recently, long-time enemies came together to form a power-sharing government, to bring to an end the ancient conflict known as the "Troubles." This was almost 800 years after Britain began its domination of Ireland, 86 years after the partition of Ireland, 38 years after the British army formally began its most recent mission in Ireland, 11 years after the peace talks began, and nine years after a peace agreement was signed. In the negotiations which led to that agreement, we had 700 days of failure and one day of success. For most of the time, progress was nonexistent or very slow. So I understand the feelings of those who may be discouraged about the Middle East.

As an aside, just recently, I spoke in Jerusalem and I mentioned the 800 years. And afterward, an elderly gentleman came up to me and he said, "Did you say 800 years?" And I said, "Yes, 800." He repeated the number again – I repeated it again. He said, "Uh, such a recent argument. No wonder you settled it." (Laughter.)

But--800 years may be recent--but from my experience there, I formed the conviction that there is no such thing as a conflict that can't be ended. Conflicts are created, conducted, and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings. I saw it happen in Northern Ireland, although, admittedly, it took a very long time. I believe deeply that with committed, persevering, and patient diplomacy, it can happen in the Middle East.

There are, of course, many, many reasons to be skeptical about the prospect for success. The conflict has gone on for so long, and has had such destructive effects, that many have come to regard it as unchangeable and inevitable. But the President and the Secretary of State don't believe that. They believe, as I do, that the pursuit of peace is so important that it demands our maximum effort, no matter the difficulties, no matter the setbacks. The key is the mutual commitment of the parties and the active participation of the United States Government, led by the President and the Secretary of State, with the support and assistance of the many other governments and institutions who want to help.

The Secretary of State has just talked about our long-term objective, and the President himself has said that his Administration – and I quote – "Will make a sustained push, working with Israelis and Palestinians to achieve the goal of two states: a Jewish state in Israel and a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security."

This effort must be determined, persevering, and patient. It must be backed up by political capital, economic resources, and focused attention at the highest levels of our government. And it must be firmly rooted in a shared vision of a peaceful future by the people who live in the region. At the direction of the President and the Secretary of State, and in pursuit of the

President's policies, I pledge my full effort in the search for peace and stability in the Middle East.

Thank you. (Applause.)

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Thank you very much, Senator Mitchell.

I next have the great personal pleasure of introducing the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ambassador Holbrooke will coordinate across the entire government an effort to achieve United States' strategic goals in the region. This effort will be closely coordinated, not only within the State Department and, of course, with USAID, but also with the Defense Department and under the coordination of the National Security Council.

It has become clear that dealing with the situation in Afghanistan requires an integrated strategy that works with both Afghanistan and Pakistan as a whole, as well as engaging NATO and other key friends, allies, and those around the world who are interested in supporting these efforts. It is such a great decision on the part of the Ambassador to respond to the call that the President and I sent out, asking that he, again, enter public service and take on this very challenging assignment. And we are grateful that he has.

Ambassador Holbrooke. (Applause.)

**AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE:** Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, Madame Secretary, Senator Special Envoy Mitchell, I thank you so much. It's an extraordinarily moving thing for me to return to this building again, having entered it so many years ago as a junior Foreign Service Officer.

As somebody whose career was determined in that initial decade of my life in the Foreign Service, I want to tell you, Mr. President, that I know that the Foreign Service and the Civil Service and the Foreign Service Officers serving around the world will appreciate and remember the fact that you chose to come to the Department on your second day to demonstrate what you have with this fantastic team. And if I may, on behalf of all Foreign Service Officers, active and retired, I want to thank you so much. (Applause.)

I'm also honored by the presence of two good and close friends, Vice President Biden and, of course, my boss--immediate boss, Secretary Clinton, and to share the podium with a colleague from the Irish days and many Senate events, Senator George Mitchell. I thank you for your confidence in offering me this daunting assignment, and all I can do is pledge my best to undertake it. I see -- thinking of my early years in the Foreign Service, I see my former roommate in Saigon, John Negroponte, here. We remember those days well, and I hope we will produce a better outcome this time. (Laughter.)

I also have to thank Kati; my two sons, David and Anthony; my stepdaughter--my beloved stepdaughter, Lizzie and her fiancé David, especially for coming down here today. And I hope that I'll be able to see you sometime in the next few years. (Laughter.)

Mr. President, Madame Secretary, Mr. Vice President, you've asked me to deal with Afghanistan and Pakistan, two very distinct countries with extraordinarily different histories, and yet intertwined by geography, ethnicity, and the current drama. This is a very difficult assignment, as we all know. Nobody can say the war in Afghanistan has gone well. And yet, as we speak here today, American men and women and their coalition partners are fighting a very difficult struggle against a ruthless and determined enemy without any scruples at all, an enemy that is willing to behead women who dare to teach in a school to young girls, an enemy that has done some of the most odious things on earth.

And across the border, lurks a greater enemy still: the people who committed the atrocities of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

We know what our long-term objective is. I hope I will be able to fill out the mandate which Secretary Clinton has mentioned: to help coordinate a clearly chaotic foreign assistance program, which must be pulled together; to work closely with General Petraeus, CENTCOM, Admiral Mullen, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General McKiernan and the command in Afghanistan, to create a more coherent program.

If our resources are mobilized and coordinated and pulled together, we can quadruple, quintuple, multiply by tenfold the effectiveness of our efforts there.

In Pakistan the situation is infinitely complex, and I don't think I would advance our goals if I tried to discuss it today. I wish to get out to the region and report back to the Secretary, the Vice President, and the President.

But I will say that in putting Afghanistan and Pakistan together under one envoy, we should underscore that we fully respect the fact that Pakistan has its own history, its own traditions, and it is far more than the turbulent, dangerous tribal areas on its western border. And we will respect that as we seek to follow suggestions that have been made by all three of the men and women standing behind me in the last few years on having a more comprehensive policy.

So I thank you again for your confidence in me. I look forward to working for you, with you closely, and following a joint effort to do better than we have in the past. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Well, we are not only honored and delighted, but challenged by the President coming here on the second day. (Laughter.) This puts the pressure on everybody. And yet, Mr. President, we feel up to that challenge. We want to do our very best work in furtherance of your goals. You set a high standard in your Inaugural Address as to what we are aiming toward. And I pledge to you on behalf of the thousands and thousands of dedicated public servants who serve you, on behalf of diplomacy and development, that we will give you our very best efforts. It is an honor to be working to fulfill the goals that you have set for our country.

Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States. (Applause.)

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