

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1604

August 16, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

As you know, I placed a hold on the nomination of U.S. Ambassador Frank Ricciardone to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey. The nomination had been in front of the Senate for less than one month before requests were made for the full Senate to approve it. I believe we need more than a few weeks to consider this nomination and related U.S. policy with Turkey. In addition to consideration of our Turkey policy, I have specific concerns related to Ambassador Ricciardone, and I would appreciate it if you could help me with the issues outlined below.

From the latter days of the Bush administration to today, opposition groups from Africa to the Middle East to Asia have been questioning the U.S. commitment to democracy and human rights. Given these questions, I am not convinced Ambassador Ricciardone is the right ambassador for Turkey at this time – despite his extensive diplomatic experience.

Ambassador Ricciardone helped oversee implementation of the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, which I strongly supported during my time as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Near East subcommittee. The Act aimed to strengthen Iraqi opposition groups, but I understand that Ricciardone did not favor a strong effort to bolster those groups, and the State Department did not develop a strategy to build up, support and coordinate the Iraqi opposition. I would appreciate any background the Department or the nominee could provide that would shed light on his approach to developing Iraq's democratic opposition prior to 2003.

Ambassador Ricciardone later became U.S. Ambassador to Egypt at a time when the Bush administration prioritized building up democratic opposition to the Mubarak regime. Ricciardone, however, downplayed these efforts and by some accounts, quickly adopted the positions and arguments of his Egyptian diplomatic counterparts. In fact, he once said on Egyptian television that "in Egypt as in the U.S., there is freedom of speech." Then and now, numerous Egyptian opposition groups disagree. The failing health of Egyptian President Mubarak suggests Egypt is heading for a pivotal moment, and I wish liberal opposition groups in Egypt were better positioned to advance a reform agenda.

I have been particularly concerned that U.S. assistance to Egypt be made available to opposition groups without prior approval from the Egyptian government and sponsored an amendment to ensure our aid funding could be spent without Egyptian permission. I am

concerned that Ambassador Ricciardone found such congressional actions frustrating and looked for ways of subverting the intent of this legislation. In addition, he was an early proponent of a proposal supported by the Egyptian government to create an endowment through which the U.S. would channel its economic assistance to Egypt. The rationale for such an endowment, whose governing structure has not been specifically described, was to marginalize discussions about funding for democracy and civil society in Egypt. I believe democracy and human rights should be considered on par with other aspects of our bilateral relationships, but I am not convinced Ambassador Ricciardone shares this view. I am concerned that the endowment plan will marginalize further discussion about the development of democracy in Egypt.

As I continue to look into his time in Egypt, I would like to have answers to the following questions:

- Did Ambassador Ricciardone ever order that a State Department statement on human rights in Egypt be toned down before posting it on the Embassy's website?
- Did the ambassador, following a press conference including Secretary of State Rice and Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit, agree with the Egyptian position that the Patriot Act essentially justifies Cairo's ongoing use of its Emergency Law to restrict freedom of speech?
- Does the ambassador believe that human rights and political freedom have improved in Egypt over the last several years, especially in light of Egypt's passage of constitutional amendments limiting the growth and development of civil society?
- Does the State Department believe that the Egyptian government should be able to reject U.S.-funded programs and projects intended to promote political reform and/or build civil society?
- How can the State Department ensure that funds to support political reforms and strengthen civil society will be spent on their intended purposes if they are a part of a U.S.-Egypt endowment?

My concerns about Ricciardone's work on Iraq and Egypt lead me to similar concerns about his approach to a number of issues in our relationship with Turkey. I believe we must be concerned that the Turkish government is moving away from its secularist roots. Next year's pivotal elections provide an opportunity for the secularists to demonstrate their strength, and we cannot let our desire for a strong bilateral relationship translate into de facto support of the ruling party, especially if we have reason to believe that opposition parties are in danger of being marginalized.

Over the last few years, secular opposition parties have complained that they received less access to the U.S. Ambassador than the ruling party, and based on his record to date, I am concerned that this situation would not change under Ambassador Ricciardone. For this reason, I request that the Department provide me with a description of recent efforts to engage Turkish political opposition groups, as well as assurances that such groups would receive equal access to Ambassador Ricciardone and U.S. Embassy Ankara under his leadership.

I am also concerned that we have not fully considered the ramifications of a Turkish tilt toward Iran and away from Israel, and I will give those issues some attention before the Senate reconvenes in September.

Thank you for your attention to the issues I have raised. I look forward to more in-depth consideration of this nomination and of U.S. policy to Turkey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sam Brownback". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Sam Brownback  
United States Senator