

March 6, 2007

Last Updated Wednesday, 28 May 2008

Ambassador's Corner

WEEKLY MESSAGE FROM AMBASSADOR JOHN BRUTON

March 6, 2007

Meeting with Senator Joe Lieberman

Joe Lieberman has a lifelong interest in politics. Even at school other students called him "the Senator." While in college, he wrote a biography of John Bailey, the Connecticut Democratic Party Chairman and head of its formidable political machine from 1946 to 1975.

He won a seat in the Connecticut State Senate in 1970 and in the US Senate in 1988. Although an opponent of the Vietnam War, he strongly supported the 1991 Gulf War and supports the current operation in Iraq.

He is a strong supporter of action on climate change and the European Union intends to work very closely with him on that topic.

He was among the first to call for the creation of a single Department of Homeland Security. Having been Al Gore's running mate in 2000, he ran for President himself in 2004, but withdrew after the Delaware Democratic primary.

We discussed with Senator Lieberman the need to have reciprocal, fair and secure arrangements for people travelling between the EU and the United States. The 27 EU Member States are all required by EU law to grant visa-free access to US citizens, but citizens from some EU Member States do not get the reciprocal privilege in the United States. Senator Lieberman is sponsoring legislation which may provide a framework for resolving this issue.

He is also working to promote greater security of goods and containers coming in and out of the United States. Europe has similar concerns, and we operate a risk-based selective screening of containers at our ports. Risk based systems allow for intelligent deployment of resources.

Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates

Last week the EU Ambassadors had a meeting with the new Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, who recently replaced Donald Rumsfeld. He is author of a book on How the Cold War was Won and served most of his career in the CIA. He was President of Texas A&M University before taking on his present job.

He met us on the day one of his leading subordinates, the Secretary of the Army, resigned. But these concerns were not at all evident in the calm and measured presentation he made. Most of the Ambassadors represented countries that are NATO members, and he reminded them of the NATO alliance commitment to devote 2% of GDP to defence. I was impressed by the way he listened carefully to all questions, answered frankly where he could, and was also willing to say he did not know the answer.

The Utility of Force

We met Secretary Gates in the week I had just completed reading *The Utility of Force—the Art of War in the Modern World* by General Rupert Smith, who commanded UN forces in Bosnia and who served for a time as GOC [General Officer Commanding] in Northern Ireland. It is a thought-provoking book, which shows that modern armies are more and more having to do their work among the people in an intelligence-driven, policing type rôle, rather than in total war with other armies. This change is due to the breakdown of states, the increase in non-state terrorism and the severe limit on state-to-state warfare that has been created by the existence of nuclear weapons.

The question posed by General Smith in his book is whether modern armies are spending their money wisely to equip them for the conflicts in which they will actually engage rather than conflicts of the past. Large tank forces (e.g. the US has 9,000 M1 Abrams tanks) may be better designed for the type of conflicts that were common prior to 1945, rather than for facing the threats of the twenty-first century.

According to General Smith, military conflicts of the future will be much more political and diplomatic than in the "total war" era. Links between politicians, diplomats and the military will be vital on a day-to-day basis. The conventional separation of civilian from military matters is becoming more difficult to maintain.

As Rupert Smith puts it:

“Essentially what is required is a strategic-level body that sets the context for the operation as a whole, and is the source of guidance and sustainment for the theatre. I think the EU has great potential in this regard. Its institutions cover the full range of governmental activities and it is developing a common foreign and security policy with a capacity to commit military forces to support it.”

This is an important validation of the EU’s role by a senior British military figure.

The Special Olympics

Last week, the representative of the Special Olympics called to see me. The European Commission has helped the Special Olympics in the past. Special Olympics offers an opportunity, through sport, for young people with disabilities to achieve public recognition of their efforts, make a wide circle of friends and change public attitudes towards disabilities. It is a great movement.

Commissioner Markos Kyprianou

Markos Kyprianou is in the United States this week and last. He is in charge of health issues in the EU and his concerns include tobacco, alcohol abuse, obesity, food labelling, controlling human and animal epidemics and promoting patient safety in hospitals. I accompanied him to meet the US Health Secretary, Michael Leavitt.

Markos Kyprianou recently pointed out that 78% of EU citizens classify medical errors as an important problem in their country and he plans a major policy on that subject soon.

He is also responsible for food safety. Europe is the world’s largest food importer: food is imported to Europe from 150 countries and the EU organises inspections of these food sources to ensure that they are fit to eat.

He has also worked especially hard on improving EU’s crisis management capacity. Many health crises, such as SARS or a ‘flu epidemic, would be cross-border phenomena and protection measures must be coordinated between states. This is a role for the EU. He has led crisis simulation exercises, involving services in all countries, to test EU responses under realistic conditions. An outbreak could occur at a weekend, or when a key decision-maker is absent; he told me that clear systems of delegated responsibility are vital.

He is also concerned with animal health.

Last week, he set up an emergency EU veterinary team, which will be available, on a 24/7 basis, to help with outbreaks either in an individual EU Member State or abroad. It will include experts on virology, wildlife, laboratory testing and risk management. This system has been operating informally up to now and it is now being given an official legal basis. It will be especially helpful in containing H5N1 avian flu. Please send me your comments about this or any of my weekly messages or other EU matters. I look forward to hearing from you!