

## Opening Statement of Matthew Whitaker, Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to NATO

[Thank Senator Grassley and Ernst]

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am honored to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I am grateful to President Trump for his confidence and to this committee for its consideration. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to strengthen the alliance, ensure the security of the American people, and uphold our nation's role as the beacon of freedom and liberty.

It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve in two administrations: first as a United States Attorney and then as President Trump's acting Attorney General. Throughout my career I have overseen critical issues related to national security, law enforcement and the protection of US interests both domestically and abroad. My experience managing the Department of Justice has equipped me well to navigate the complexities at NATO.

As a former college football player at the University of Iowa, I understand that for a team to be strong and successful, for NATO to be strong and successful, every player on the field—all 32 allies—must be strong. A team is only as strong as its weakest link. To ensure victory, every teammate must pull their weight and do their job. NATO's strength lies in the commitment and readiness of all 32 members.

President Trump has been clear; the United States remains committed to NATO and to the principle of peace through strength. That principle has guided us since NATO's founding and remains as vital today as ever.

During President Trump's first term, America was strong, and our strength sent a message to the rest of the world. Peace prevailed with no new conflicts, ISIS was decimated, Soleimani was brought to final justice, the groundbreaking Abraham Accords were signed, and America was safe and powerful. I stand firm with President Trump in promoting peace abroad and security and prosperity at home. Strength deters aggression, and history has taught us that when America leads, the world is safer.

I believe that a robust NATO can continue to serve as a bedrock of peace and prosperity, but its vitality rests on every ally doing its fair share. By growing our economies and investing in our common defense, the free world will thrive and reach new heights of achievement. Under President Trump's leadership, NATO will be stronger and more effective than ever before.

It is important to remember what George Washington said in his first annual address to Congress- "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

In the spirit of President Washington's wise counsel, we must also recognize that true leadership demands fairness, accountability, and shared sacrifice among nations.

Leadership is not charity. The American people have carried the burden of global security for too long. For decades, U.S. taxpayers have funded the lion's share of NATO's defense while too many of our allies have failed to meet even their most basic obligations. Europe can no longer ask a welder from my home state of Iowa to pay more in taxes to bolster Europe's defense while the products he makes are subject to unfair trade practices.

President Trump has been clear on this issue: NATO Allies must meet their obligations. The United States will no longer subsidize nations that refuse to pay their fair share. That is why, if confirmed, I will work to advance a policy of Peace Through Strength by ensuring that all NATO members meet a minimum defense spending level of 5%, thereby ensuring NATO is the most successful military alliance in history.

This is not just an American mandate it is a necessity for the survival of the Alliance. Russia and Ukraine are at war, China is expanding its military influence, rogue states like Iran and North Korea continue to destabilize global security, and terrorist organizations remain intent on striking the West. The threats are real, and they will not wait for bureaucratic debates or half-measures.

That is why our NATO Allies must:

1. Commit to spending at least 5% of GDP on defense with no exceptions, no excuses.
2. Prioritize modernization and interoperability because outdated forces and strategies cannot deter modern threats.
3. Expand their contributions to NATO missions and readiness.
4. Prepare for hybrid threats and asymmetrical warfare.

I want to recognize and express my gratitude to those allies that are doing everything that is asked of them. Your contributions have not gone unnoticed.

NATO was founded on the principles of individual and collective defense--an attack against one is an attack against all. That commitment must be backed not just by words, but by action.

Our mission is not just to deter, but to defeat those who seek to do us harm. That means reinforcing our military capabilities and ensuring that NATO remains the premier force for stability in the region. But strength is not only in our military power; it is in our resolve. That is the spirit of this Alliance. That is the spirit of America.

We stand at a crossroads: we either commit to a NATO that is strong, capable, and prepared or we allow hesitation and inaction to embolden our adversaries. I know which path I choose. I believe in a NATO that stands as a bulwark against tyranny, a NATO where every member bares its fair share, and a NATO that remains a force for peace because it is backed by strength.

Together, as equal contributing partners, we will ensure the security of our nations, the protection of our citizens, and the preservation of peace for future generations.

At NATO's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, President Reagan said – "Throughout its history, the NATO Alliance has been challenged by the military power and political ambitions of [its adversaries]. Yet, in every decade, the nations of the Alliance have consistently pulled together to maintain peace through their collective strength and determination."

If confirmed, I will work every day to ensure that our allies understand this simple but unwavering truth: **peace is secured through strength, in steadfast partnership with those willing to defend it.**

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.